THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Spirits in Solitude: Romanticism in the Films of Sofia Coppola, Spike Jonze, Charlie Kaufman, and Wes Anderson

Michelle Devereaux
PhD Film Studies
University of Edinburgh
2016

Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of Romanticism on a selection of seven films from four contemporary American filmmakers: Sofia Coppola, Wes Anderson, Charlie Kaufman, and Spike Jonze.

The research questions are as follows: How do particular Romantic ideas, either canonical ones or those located on the more critical fringes of Romanticism, relate to the work of the filmmakers I consider? What Romantic features do these films regularly exhibit, both aesthetically and in terms of narrative? How do these features inform their overall point of view? Finally, how do such Romantic ideas and aesthetics relate to the current cultural milieu in which the films were created?

There are many familiar and more obscure Romantic strains running through the films. These include a preoccupation with personal history and memory; an undercurrent of deeply felt emotion and reliance upon mood and tone to convey it; a foregrounding of the creative process and the imagination; and an ambivalent relationship to both the natural world and civilised society.

In terms of aesthetics, the films in question depend on qualities of the beautiful, picturesque, and sublime to represent the complex emotional states of their characters and to elicit emotional responses in their audiences. Above all, these films represent a preoccupation with subjectivity and self-consciousness: specifically, the coming to personal self-consciousness that creates a rift between the individual subject and a greater sense of society.

By utilising the work of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic authors and philosophers such as Friedrich Schlegel, William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, John Keats and others, combined with twentieth- and twenty-first century

readings of these works via literary and cultural theorists and critics such as Harold Bloom, M.H. Abrams, Leo Marx and Anne Mellor, I emphasise the historical trajectory of general Romantic concepts. Taking established cinematic theories ("quirky" cinema, "smart" film, the "new sincerity") as a point of entry, I explore the underlying stylistic and narrative connections between the films I discuss. I argue these films share a fundamentally Romantic form and vision specific to their own historical and cultural environment.

Declaration

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my primary supervisor, Dr David Sorfa, for his conscientious guidance and invaluable advice during the researching and writing of this thesis. I also thank my secondary supervisor, Dr Daniel Yacavone, for his help and encouragement.

The impetus for this thesis came from the writing of my 2008 master's dissertation at the University of Edinburgh, which examined Romantic influences on filmmaker Michel Gondry's films as they relate to past modes of silent, surrealist, avant-garde, and art cinema. As such, I would like to thank my dissertation supervisors, Dr Kim Knowles and Dr Martine Beugnet, for encouraging me to expand my research into a PhD thesis.

Thank you to my good friend and fellow PhD candidate Danièle Wecker for her unflagging academic and emotional support during the past four years. I also thank my parents for their support and encouragement. Finally, thanks to the University of Edinburgh Global Research Scholarship funding body and the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences for financially underwriting my research. It would not have been possible without their generous support.

This is dedicated to David, who loved movies almost as much as he loved music.

Table of Contents

List of Images

Introduction

This thesis examines the influence of Romanticism on a selection of seven films from four contemporary American filmmakers: Sofia Coppola, Wes Anderson, Charlie Kaufman, and Spike Jonze. My research questions were as follows: How do particular Romantic ideas, either canonical ones or those located on the more critical fringes of Romanticism, relate to the work of the filmmakers I consider? What Romantic features do these films regularly exhibit, both aesthetically and in terms of narrative? How do these features inform their overall ideology? Here I draw on Robert Phillip Kolker's definition of film ideology as the way a film "speaks" to and is read by an audience in the context of "the larger social, cultural, psychological, and political structure" that informs it (Kolker 13). Finally, what does the possible turn to so-called "neoromanticism" (Vermeulen and van den Akker) in these films say both about the works themselves and the contemporary age in which they were created? The filmmakers I consider offer varied approaches to questions of intersubjectivity, self-consciousness, sympathetic emotional engagement, and imaginative creation, but all approach them in what can be defined as Romantic terms.

What Is "Romantic"?

The term "Romantic" is often utilised and just as often misunderstood. What exactly does it mean to say something is "Romantic", specifically in terms of a canon of Romantic artistic works? Typically the Romantic age has been defined as a historically bound movement stretching from 1789 (the year of the French Revolution) to 1832 (the year of the Reform Act in Britain) or 1834 (Bainbridge 6). Some scholars, such as Albert Joseph George and Maurice Shroder, contend the period lasted until the mid-nineteenth century (George xi). Romanticism was not simply one movement, but a collection of them, from the Jena School German Romanticism of the 1790s (Millan-Zaibert 2) to the French Romantic novelists of the 1820s and beyond (Shroder vii). The heterogeneous nature of Romanticism leads Seamus Perry to define it as a "posthumous invention" (Perry 4). Use of the term "Romantic" to describe a particular style or outlook did not become popular until the

later nineteenth century in Britain (Bainbridge 4) and was not cemented until the critical reappraisals of the twentieth century (4).

In the 1940s, René Wellek influentially characterised British Romantic literature as employing "imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style" (Bainbridge 4). Wellek's proposed corpus was notoriously narrow, which helped solidify the Romantic canon as a handful of British poets—William Wordsworth (b.1770–d.1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (b.1772–d. 1834), Lord Byron (b.1788–d. 1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (b.1792–d.1822), John Keats (b.1795–d.1821), and William Blake (b.1757–d.1827)—and neglected scores of other poets and writers of the era (4).

Wellek's definition, while a good starting point, is vague, and the body of work he cites fails to include non-British Romantic works entirely. Arthur Lovejoy famously proposes that instead of "Romanticism", we should speak in terms of a "plurality of Romanticisms" (5). Similarly, Jerome McGann acknowledges that "a systemic or comprehensive accounting of Romanticism—of its works or ideology—is an impossibility: indeed, it is a contradiction in terms" (McGann 47). For McGann and other critics, that contradiction lies in Romanticism's aspiration toward completeness and its simultaneous acknowledgement of the impossibility of perfection (47). German Romantic poet and philosopher Novalis's definition of Romanticism is more descriptive:

> By endowing the commonplace with a higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic (Novalis 60).

Fundamentally, the qualities of Romantic works represent a "cataclysmic coming-into-being of the world" (Abrams 93). The Romantic, it follows, is located within the "mysterious" experience of a phenomenological becoming—a constant hoping, striving, and doing related to a steadfast Romantic longing—rather than in the impossible completion of such a quest.

There are many familiar and more obscure Romantic strains running through the films I consider, which I dissect in the course of five chapters. These include a

preoccupation with personal history and memory (see Jackson Bate, McGann, and Pottle on how memory and history shape Romantic identity); a deep undercurrent of emotion and a reliance upon mood and tone to convey it (see Bate and Pfau for an exploration of mood in Romantic works, and Sinnerbrink and Laine for its application in filmmaking); a foregrounding of the creative process and the all-important imagination (McGann, Rzpeka, and Bloom apply these concepts to the British Romantics); and an ambivalent relationship to both the natural world and civilised society (see Bloom, Marx, McGann, and Hartman for an exploration of the often simplified notion of the Romantic in relation to nature).

In terms of aesthetics, they depend on qualities of the beautiful, picturesque, and sublime to elicit complex emotional responses in their characters and their audiences (see Shaw's work on the sublime, Mohr for an exploration of the picturesque, and Jarvis on beauty). Above all, these films represent a preoccupation with subjectivity and self-consciousness (see Bloom, Henderson, and McGann for discussions of Romantic subjectivity), the latter not necessarily in the sense of meta-textual and reflexive analysis (although there is plenty of that evident in these films—see Mayshark, MacDowell, and Sconce for a discussion of their reflexivity) but in the more Romantic sense: the coming to personal self-consciousness that creates a rift between the individual subject and the greater sense of a social self (Bloom 6).

Harold Bloom considers subjectivity, or self-consciousness, "the salient problem of Romanticism" (Bloom 1). Similarly, when Geoffrey Hartman writes that "Wordsworth cannot find his theme because he already has it: himself" ("Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness" 53), he highlights the problematic solipsism shadowing the subjectivity of Romantic thought. Echoing both Bloom's and Hartman's sentiments, Philip Shaw writes, "the Wordsworthian mind is self-contained, serving no other purpose than itself" (102). While the Romantic movement is one from nature to the "imagination's freedom"—the unleashing of visionary subjectivity beyond and above that of nature—that freedom also represents a move that can lead to the "destruction of the social self":

> The quest is to widen consciousness as well as intensify it, but the quest is shadowed by a spirit that tends to narrow consciousness to an acute preoccupation with self. This shadow of the imagination is solipsism, what Shelley calls the Spirit of Solitude (Bloom 6).

The resulting realisation of such self-consciousness entails giving up a feeling of totality, a connection with the external world (a world that includes other consciousness—that is, other people). How does one negotiate between such an all-important visionary self and a social self? This divide between self and other results in fractured selves, or spirits, left to the solitude of their own subjective consciousness.

The "spirit" of my title does not refer to a core essential being or "soul" in the divine sense, but the principle of this self-consciousness and the fissures it potentially creates between self and world. I argue that this Romantic principle, and the perpetual desire to establish intersubjective connection that this self-consciousness can impede, forms the implicit Romantic theme in the films that I discuss.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, I consider the term "Romantic" as both an artistic mode of expression(s) as well as a historically situated age where such expressions were principally fomented. (Because it is defined principally by its epoch, I have chosen to capitalise the term except when used in its most vague, generic sense.) While the filmmakers I consider are all American, their cultural and artistic influences are much more global in outlook, one of the reasons I have chosen to correlate them with the Romantic movements of other nations as well. This also allows for a greater understanding of the pluralities of Romanticism Lovejoy references. I draw not only from the work of the famous English poets Wellek discusses, but also German Romantics such as Schlegel and Novalis, writers of Gothic fiction such as Anne Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, American Romantics such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and British women authors such as Felicia Hemens and Charlotte Smith.

Some (the German Romantics) predate the British canon, while others (the Americans) follow it; still others, such as Smith and Mary Shelley, were more or less contemporaries and often critically engaged with the work of their (posthumously, at least) more celebrated counterparts. I use Romantic philosophy, texts, and critical theory as a foundation for engagement with the films I discuss. I combine this with a larger theoretical framework utilising medium-specific analysis of the films. I have chosen to focus on films at least co-written by their directors because the idea of "authenticity of origins", directly linked to filmic auteur theory, is in essence a fundamentally Romantic principle. While this is not an auteurist study per se, it relies upon the Romantic idea of origins and intentions of a more or less singular consciousness—a somewhat absurd notion given the collaborative nature of filmmaking, but one inextricable with the theories of authorship and romanticised notions of artistic practice that these filmmakers often embrace.

This thesis does not involve dissecting conceptions of romance as they relate to generic conventions like the "love story" (although Romantic love does play a role). Rather, I engage with twentieth- and twenty-first century critical interpretations of European and American Romantic artworks, principally poetry and literature. I have chosen, for practical purposes, not to engage with the differences between factions of Romantic criticism, neither in discourse nor in method of approach (for example, New Historicism versus formalism) (Bainbridge 12, 18). More important is my selection of films—this is not a thesis on Romanticism or artists from the Romantic period, but rather one about how those artists' conceptions of Romanticism are expressed in contemporary American "art-house" film. (The oldest film I discuss is Sofia Coppola's 1999 debut *The Virgin Suicides*, while the most recent is Spike Jonze's *Her*, released in 2013.)

By utilising the work of theorists and critics such as Harold Bloom, M.H. Abrams, Anne Mellor, Geoffrey Hartman, Jerome McGann, and other major and minor scholars of the past and present century, I hope to emphasise the historical trajectory of Romantic thought—one that has endured to the twenty-first century as presented in the work of the filmmakers I have chosen to write about. Just as I am looking back to the past in order to analyse the present state of film, Romantic artists themselves were in part inspired by looking back to the mythmaking past of

medieval and chivalric romances (Snell 1) and were preoccupied by personal and cultural history in general (Milnes and Sinanan 4). Present realities are, of course, just as important. The Romanticism of these filmmakers is shaped as much by the historical and cultural realities in which they operate as Wordsworth or Keats or Mary Shelley were shaped by their own time (McGann 19), so much of my project focuses on how these filmmakers have adapted, altered, affirmed or challenged such thought, however unwittingly.

There has yet to be an in-depth academic analysis of the specific Romantic attributes of contemporary American film, especially as they relate to original Romantic works and the critical responses to those works. There have been multiple book-length studies of Romanticism in British film, but these do not necessarily delve into Romantic ideology in a methodical way. In *Romanticists and Modernists in British Cinema* (2010), John Orr discusses the relation of Romanticism and modernism to British film, delineating two separate strains in the work of filmmakers such as Michael Powell, Alfred Hitchcock, and Terence Davies. Richard Allen's 2007 book, *Hitchcock's Romantic Irony,* argues that the legendary director's British and Hollywood films adopt the perspective of the Romantic ironist.

Much of the writing on Romanticism and film is very recent, which situates my work in an emerging field of cinematic study. Stella Hockenhull's 2013 monograph *Aesthetics and Neoromanticism in Film: Landscapes in Contemporary British Cinema* offers an analysis of formal components in British film in relation to Romanticism, specifically in terms of the natural landscape and the sublime. In *Forgotten Dreams* (2016), Laurie Ruth Johnson explores the Romanticism of German filmmaker Werner Herzog. Also from 2016, Richard I. Suchenski's *Projections of Memory* connects twentieth-century avant-garde film to Romantic traditions, particularly via the "epic" film. My intent is to examine the Romantic influence on what is perhaps a less obvious body of work: a particular brand of contemporary American cinema that positions itself in the liminal territory between the world of art film and that of the Hollywood mainstream.

Summary of Argument

I am not suggesting that the filmmakers I study have consciously chosen to engage with Romantic aesthetics and philosophy; rather, just as Romanticism was in part a "conversation with […] the unconscious"[1] (Snell 7), I argue that Romantic concepts form the very fabric of these works in an almost unconscious sense.[2] The work of Coppola, Jonze, Anderson, and Kaufman is steeped in a Romantic tradition that follows from many of their filmic and larger artistic influences, including European New Wave cinema, New Hollywood Romanticism and filmic surrealism, as well as twentieth-century literature and photography. These traditions permeate the general landscape of European and American culture and have had an enduring role in shaping art beyond the Romantic era.

These earlier artists' Romantic tendencies engage in a dialogue with modernism, as an aesthetic movement, and modernity, as the historical reality of their time.[3] To a large extent, the films I discuss express similar preoccupations. However, they are generally less political and experimental and more personal, even solipsistic, a trend that continues the "personal politics" of what Jeffrey Sconce refers to as American 1990s "smart cinema" (Sconce 352).

Unlike their cinematic forebears of the late 1960s and 1970s, who focused on the "social politics of power, institutions, representations and subjectivity", the filmmakers I discuss shift attention to the interpersonal relations of "power, communication, emotional dysfunction and identity in white middle-class culture" (352). They are all fundamentally concerned with the matter of the alienated self and its relation to the external world, and that sense of alienation expresses itself in the

[1] While Snell is specifically referencing psychoanalysis' Romantic influences, I am using the term in its most everyday sense here, suggesting that the filmmakers in question are not completely aware of the source of many of their preoccupations, although my thesis does engage with some psychoanalytic theory.

[2] It should be noted that sometimes these choices are indeed conscious, such as Coppola's decision to shoot with 35mm film rather than digital for her 2003 feature *Lost in Translation*. The filmmaker says the choice was due to her desire for a "fragmented, dislocated, melancholic, romantic feeling", invoking not just Romantic longing for a past "enchanted few days" but also a sense of the fractured indeterminacy of the self in the present (Thompson).

[3] For arguments connecting Romanticism to surrealism and other modern art movements see Abel, Adamowicz, O'Pray, Cunningham, Larson and Wiedmann; for Romanticism's links to the French New Wave see Andrew and Caughie.

various emotional states their films convey: melancholy, restlessness, confusion, despair. But they also often express a sense of hope: bursts of joyous naiveté or intersubjective expressions of deep feeling, just as "[t]he Romantics glimpsed the darkness to come, yet a principle of hope prevailed" (Trilling, *Scars of the Spirit* 167–68). Their characters may act blasé or disaffected, but they all fundamentally care, even as they remain isolated within the solitude of their self-consciousness and occasional solipsism (Mayshark 188).

The Romantic conception of the power of individual imagination to expand social imagination explains these filmmakers' imaginative, often fantastical "redescriptions" (Rorty 72) of reality, and it also speaks to their qualified hopeful spirit. Far from cynical or nihilistic stabs in the dark at an uncaring universe, these films and their characters "rarely succumb to hopelessness" (Mayshark 12). They engage on a deeply moral and ethical level, mostly through problems of the alienated individual's relation to their personal social network (usually the family) and society as a whole (5).

Fundamentally these films exhibit a preoccupation with self-identity: the notion of self and its definition in relation to other selves, and even to what constitutes a self. Since the Romantic era, the idea of an "authentic" self has become degraded, a casualty of postmodernism and poststructuralism (Jameson 62). This "post-structuralist attack" (Henderson 2)—that such self-identity is simply an illusion and there is no "core" self—in many ways spurs a certain conservative, consoling mode in the films I consider. Characters often personify a more reactionary strain of Romanticism in their evocation of Wordsworth's "anxiety of hope" (*Prelude*, book XII), a longing to return to the harmony present in pre-self-consciousness—or the belief that "the idea of unity has to be recovered or reborn" (McGann 40). Characters incessantly search for the means by which to reassert and reiterate their own identities as a way to protect themselves from a sense of inauthenticity, even as the very notions of the authentic now seems moot. They re-enact their own growth personally or through others (especially children), or they engage in a continual process of reinvention in order to stumble upon their "real" selves. This generally amounts to a series of false starts and failed attempts.

The films themselves often appear as imaginative recreations of impossible pasts as a protection against uncertain futures. From Caden Cotard's relentless desire to embalm his entire life through his art; to Richie, Margot, and Chas Tenenbaum's attempts to recapture the faded glory of their childhoods, which were miserable in the first place; to *The Virgin Suicides'* nameless boys' quest to forensically recreate the magical allure of their objects of affection, who they never even really knew, characters continually plumb their histories with the intention of self-discovery. Often they are just as deeply mired in self-delusion, and seem incapable of meaningfully engaging in their day-to-day lives.

Despite their obsession with the past, the films' Romantic inclinations are grounded in their own idealised historical time and place. Many of their stories seem to take place in a nebulous, transhistorical otherworld that does not quite correspond to our own. Leo Marx terms such a place "moral geography", an ideal, mythic landscape used to work through subjective fascinations (Marx 245). Grappling with the anxiety of indeterminacy and "weakening of historicity" that signifies the postmodern condition (Jameson 58), these filmmakers, through their art, exhibit a yearning for a past acknowledged as imaginary. While utilising irony, they take aim at that irony's "tyranny" by injecting their narratives with sincere sympathy (Mayshark 5, 7). Their films are overly concerned with reconstruction (6), even as they recognise that these attempted reconstructions are bound to fail, because they are reconstructions of imaginative illusions.

According to Jesse Mayshark, "If there is a defining dialectic [in the films] it is between the self and the world" (11). In many ways that is the way their characters prefer things, but the status quo of solitude has intense and unasked for repercussions. Ultimately, the characters in these films reflect the filmmakers', and our own, grappling with this sense of alienation and estrangement: alone even in a crowd, they are solitary figures, strangers not only to family, friends, partners, and co-workers, but also to themselves. While they represent a partially conservative turn (King 7) toward a past modernism—with its utopian vision, a "standstill" of life perfected through utility (Benjamin 170)—they embrace many of the seemingly inescapable tenets of postmodernism, such as fragmented subjectivity, irony, and self-consciousness (Waugh 5). That turn toward the past is a turn toward renewed

meaning. Ironically, it represents a desire for progress, even as the notion itself is called into question. It is this very oscillation between the poles of modernism and postmodernism that defines their particular historically based brand of Romanticism (Vermeulen and van den Akker). In the following pages I will elucidate the twentieth- and twenty-first century critical responses to several major components of Romantic philosophy and art works in order to form an initial theoretical framework for my corpus. I start with one of the most important ideas: the concept of the Romantic Imagination.

Imagination and the Romantic Sensibility

In his 1841 essay "Circles", Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that a Romantic view of individual life, and human history, is of a cyclical, unending progression akin to an ever-turning wheel powered by individual imagination:

> The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end. The extent to which this generation of circles, wheel without wheel, will go, depends on the force or truth of the individual soul (Emerson 10:5).

This passage speaks to the Romantic belief in the endless inquiry of the human imagination and its limitless potential, that "[e]very ultimate fact is only the first of a new series" (10:6). Such a belief encompasses the idea that "[w]e shall never find descriptions so perfect that imaginative redescription will become pointless" (Rorty 71). It describes a perpetual motion machine of inspiration and hopeful renewal, but, unlike Enlightenment conceptions of progress, it denies ultimate knowledge, instead affirming an unending epistemological quest (71).

Critically, it also expresses the idea that imagination is the key to human advancement; it is the "principle vehicle of human progress" (Rorty 71). This emphasis on individual imaginative power was evidenced by a "growing self-consciousness in art" in the late-eighteenth century (Bate, "The English Romantic Compromise" 169). Fundamentally, it is indicative of the emphasis on the "cult of individual genius" (Hamilton 18): an acknowledgment that poets are, as Shelley wrote, "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (*Defence of Poetry* 48), who

share a special visionary access to hidden fundamental truths that ordinary people do not (McGann 114). Genius is the ingredient that "arrests the moving fantasms, the material and images of beggardly day dreaming, the corrupting movements of romance delirium" and renders the Romantic imagination's "evident light and truth" in its place (Botting 108)—it expands fanciful illusion to a sublime state of reason. Such poetic genius was only accessible through a combination of lived experience, deep feeling, and patient reflection (Bate 164).

If theories of the Enlightenment considered imagination merely as a "function of memory, the recollection of decaying sensory data that was to be brought forth to mind after its objects were gone" (Wolf 20), the Romantic artist sought to reintroduce the power of the "active mind" in an attempt to break the bonds of materialism (20). For the Romantic, the imagination was the source of sympathy for others (Bate 162) and a "touchstone of stability and order" for the self (McGann 68). It was even cast in quasi-divine terms, as in Coleridge and Wordsworth's conviction that it would "transcend historical divisions" and see "into the life of things in a secular age" (98, 101). Both writers "wished to make imagination not merely creative but a power for apprehending truth" (Pottle 283). Blake went so far as to align the poet's imaginative power with the "creative power of God" (Frye 130). In accordance with such a project, the Romantics embraced myth and mythmaking as protection against the rationality they thought inhibited true vision (Bate 151).

Artistic mythmaking becomes "a means to resist the intelligence intelligently" (Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'" 50), a higher calling than the mere functionalism of intellect. Through imaginative power, the artist resists spiritually deadening rationality to arrive at something greater and more exultant. Under this rubric, fiction, not the objective scientific enquiry of Enlightenment, holds the key to enlightened truth. While Romantic thought is rooted in hope, that hope "has been shifted from the history of mankind" to "the mind of the single individual" (Abrams 111). It is, in some ways, an emancipatory attitude that focuses on the power of the individual through creative freedom.

While imagination, along with emotion, "began to destroy the perfect balance and the harmony which neo-classic[4] art had sought" (Monk 28), it also unbalanced (or perhaps simply brought into stark relief) the separation between self and world. Geoffrey Hartman contends that the Romantic poet harnessed the "sympathetic imagination" within in order to counteract solipsism and "entice the brooding soul out of itself, toward nature first, then toward humanity" (55). This is related to Harold Bloom's conception of the "quest romance", comprising a series of stages in which immature and wild creative impulses are channelled into the pointedly self-actualising imagination of the Romantic poet (Bloom 3). The first phase requires a "radical withdrawal of self" that can result in "visionary solipsism" (Rzepka 9), but such solipsism is eventually overcome in favour of the "Real Man" or "Imagination" stage Bloom characterises as "the outward turning of the triumphant Imagination" toward a larger humanity (17).

Charles Rzepka, however, refers to the Romantic imagination as "the self as mind" (5); enraptured by his own power, "The Romantic poet turned away, not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself" (16). The traditional Romantic view of sublimity, sometimes called the "Wordsworthian" or "egotistical" sublime, exemplifies this notion. Developed from ideas of sublimity espoused by both Edmund Burke (in relation to the physical nature of sublime objects) and Immanuel Kant (in relation to imagination's role in sublimity), the Romantic sublime is based on the subjective perception of the individual, in a fundamental shift "from world to mind" (Shaw 73). "It is not the object itself" that now possesses the characteristics of sublimity, "but the manner in which that mind apprehends that object" (79). For Wordsworth the imagination itself becomes sublime—its power is "awful" and has the capacity to obliterate both noumenon (or external reality) and phenomenon (the mind's experience of that reality), but it is also the source of poetic vision (101). As such, the imagination must be contained in order to protect a sense of self (102).

[4] Featuring the main aesthetic hallmarks of symmetry, clarity, and regularity, the mid-eigtheenth century neoclassical period was largely inspired by the art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as the revival of antiquity during the Renaissance (Palmer 24).

Because subjectivity is so central to Romantic thought, the self is tasked with living "authentically" above all else: the Romantic was "a person of true sensibility, possessed of a passionate and impetuous nature which would simply not permit dissembling or hypocrisy" (Campbell 177). In the Romantic age, ideas of sincerity and authenticity were being re-evaluated and reconstructed in enduring ways, ways integral to the realisation of the Romantic identity.

Romanticism, Sincerity, and Authenticity: A Problem of Identity

The idea of the "authentic" versus "in-authentic" self (Sinanan and Miles 6) is another key "problem" of Romanticism. Much engagement with canonical Romantic writing presumes a model of psychological depth—the presumption that a fundamental core of being exists (Henderson 4). That idea of the core self had a profound influence on new notions of authenticity in the Romantic era. Authenticity became a matter of a moral strength not based on any external authority, but on that of personal subjectivity: "authority moves indoors" and "being oneself" takes on primary significance (Milnes and Sinanan 5). This is the birth of the modern conception of authenticity—and by relation, sincerity—one that finds its source in the "authorizing origins" of the subject (5). Authenticity is no longer related to a realistic depiction of the world, but instead to the "truth" of the mind's eye, "something that really proceeds from its origin" (6). Sincerity relates to the outward expression of such an authenticity; it becomes essentially the social practice of authenticity (4).

The critical function of sincerity now becomes the "burden" of bridging the widening gap between an authentic self and the world (6). Autobiography becomes a key mode of expression in this "Age of Feeling" (Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine" 13), allowing a correspondence between the artist and audience that becomes a signature of sincerity (Milnes and Sinanan 13). In *Walden*, Thoreau expresses a desire for a "simple and sincere account of his own life" (Thoreau 5–6). When in his *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth claims, "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 6) which should be delivered in the unfettered, naturalistic language of ordinary life, he

relates the idea of authenticity as integrally an intuitive and direct quality (Milnes and Sinanan 19).

In much the same way as the filmmakers I discuss have been branded as socially disengaged and self-absorbed (see Moats, Mayshark), the Romantics have often been accused of celebrating modes of escapism (see Abrams, McGann). But M.H. Abrams insists they "were obsessed with the realities of their era" (110). With the burgeoning economic realities of capitalism taking hold, and Europe embroiled in a series of Napoleonic wars, in the beginning of the nineteenth century the social and political realms were undoubtedly unstable (see Lefort, Shaw, and Marx). Caught up in the sublime political upheaval of revolution in America and, especially, France, Romantic writers embraced its potential and "unbounded and hence impossible hopes" (Abrams 110). While they were ultimately disappointed by the revolution's unfulfilled promises, they turned their hope and desire for change toward themselves, making it personal.

There were, of course, political differences between nations and even within them—Hazlitt, Hunt, Shelley, and Byron reportedly admired Napoleon (Nemoianu 188), and Emerson, unlike most, embraced the technological advances that came with the machine age (Marx 231). But all were a product of an age of new frontiers. Wordsworth, especially, shifted focus from this uncertain and foreboding societal future to what Abrams calls "egalitarian revolution of the spirit […] of the equivalence of souls, the heroic dimensions of common life, and the grandeur of the ordinary and the trivial in Nature" (Abrams 117). In a sense, Romanticism embraced the inverse of the adage "the personal is political", popularised by mid-twentieth century identity politics activists (Hanisch). For Wordsworth and others, the political became personal. This "spiritual quietism" eschewed "overt political action" in favour of passivity and acts of imagination (Abrams 110, 111). It was, in a sense, a revolution from within.

Charles Rzepka considers that publication of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* marks a fundamental shift from "the world as an object of knowledge […] to the thinking subject's point of view on the world" (Rzepka 10). Personal feeling and sympathy replace objectivity in a quest for truth, and both are linked to expressions

of authenticity. Thomas Pfau suggests that these expressions were "attempts to trace political, economic, and spiritual history back to its manifestation as emotional experience" (Pfau 2), that is, to source the feelings that lead to the facts. If "sincere feeling is *in* the language before it is produced by reflecting *on* it" (Sinanan and Miles 11, their emphasis), the author's emotional sincerity is expressed by "contagion" (Pfau 3), a sympathetic communion that starts with the direct expression of feeling in the writing itself, leading to a similar emotional experience in the perceiver.

Whereas the previous "age of sensibility" (Abrams 98) was attuned to the standards of societal convention and feigned emotion, the Romantic age associates "emotional susceptibility" with goodness and "make[s] custom and etiquette the source of all that is undesirable […] leading to the contrasting of 'self' and 'society'" (Campbell 177). Sympathy becomes an expression of individual sensibility, removed from the inauthentic organising principles of socially proscribed norms and rules (7). In contrast to the social constrictions of civilisation, nature was often viewed, in the fashion of proto-Romantic Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as an "authentic voice" (Grayson 81) removed from society's hypocrisy. Childhood was linked to authentic nature, as it exists in a state of "sensation unmediated by intellect" (85). In a sense, the very idea of whether a "social self" can even be authentic is thrown into question (Sinanan and Miles 10).

Just as Jerome McGann sees different "phases" of English Romanticism, moving from a "visionary" mode to one focused on revision and self-critique (McGann 108, 109), Angela Esterhammer posits that some Romantic works actually "interpret sincerity as a code or convention" (104) by emphasising its performative dimensions. She contrasts Wordsworth's "spontaneous outpouring as the fiat of 'authentic' selfhood" with Byron's later "tireless performance of selfhood" (Esterhammer 3, 4). Far from being a simple expression of inner authenticity, in this later mode, sincerity becomes "fictional, imaginary or even downright false" (110). If sincerity is something that needs to be "embodied"—that is, expressed physically by verbal and other physical signs—its experience is unavoidably both spontaneous and theatrical: "This paradoxical notion of sincerity as a *socially accessible and*

physically engaged performance of interior emotion is paradigmatic for late-Romantic poetry" (Esterhammer 113, her emphasis).

The progression from the "essential" sincerity of Wordsworth to the "constructed" sincerity of later Romantic works reveals that newly redefined notions of sincerity and authenticity in the Romantic period were already being problematized by the early nineteenth century (105). Letitia Landon's poem "History of the Lyre" (1829) reveals "whether sincere or insincere, the mental states of others are unknowable except by the indirect evidence of appearance, language, and other external or publicly shared conventions" (116). (I discuss this "problem of other minds" in chapter three.) This newfound reflexivity within the text engages in an uneasy dialectic of performance and sincerity, which is the case in many of the films I discuss. The films' characters often suffer from extreme crises of identity, exemplifying this Romantic grappling with the idea of authentic selfhood.

If expressions of sincerity, which were being called into question, were "fused" with ideas of authenticity in the Romantic era (Milnes and Sinanan 2), it now seemed a possibility that the "depth model" of authenticity was itself questionable, and one's "own 'likeness' or image is all […] there ever is to lose" (Esterhammer 114). Perhaps, it was entertained, there is no "core" self at all. As Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan show, the "desire to discover a holistic self at the heart of writing" was a key Romantic project, but "authentic selfhood remain[ed] elusive, disappearing even as it is grasped" (Milnes and Sinanan 2). Geoffrey Hartman considers that the "ethos of self-fashioning", defined by Coleridge via Shakespeare, might lead to "a restless identity search" (Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit* 33). For some later Romantics, especially Keats, what Hartman calls "anti-self-consciousness" ("Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'" 188) offers an alternative to such a crisis. For Keats, the authentic poet "has no Identity […] he has no self" (Keats, *Letters* 157). Instead, a celebration of physical phenomena results in what he calls the "material sublime" (Keats, *Poems* 237), an overabundance of sensation leading to vertiginous bliss that goes "beyond" individual subjectivity (Gigante 441).

Internal conflict is endemic in much of Romantic thought and its attendant works, especially in terms of its key tenets of imagination, authenticity, and subjectivity. In

many ways, "Romanticism […] initiates the conflict between modernity's homesick longing for authenticity and its dogged pursuit of critique" (Milnes and Sinanan 17). The films discussed in this thesis exemplify many of these struggles with identity and the alienation between self and world. The paradoxical state between unmediated authenticity and self-criticism can best be delineated via a discussion of Romantic irony. In contemporary terms, it is evident in what has been termed the "metamodernist" sensibility of the twenty-first century.

"Metamodernism" and Romantic Irony

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's 2010 essay "Notes on Metamodernism" outlines the key traits of what they consider "the romantic turn in contemporary aesthetics". Just as in many ways modernism was a reaction to Romanticism[5] (Whitworth 63), postmodernism offers a rebuke of the holistic utopian philosophies of modernism, resulting in a sense of "indeterminacy" which can "allow for an exemplary respect for the particular" (Hamilton 19). But Vermeulen and van den Akker claim that postmodernism's "years of plenty, pastiche, and parataxis"—its reliance on ironic detachment, knowing reflexivity, and fragmented subjectivity—has reached an epistemological dead end, with seemingly nothing able or willing to take its place. Such postmodernism describes a feeling that Jean-François Lyotard describes as the condition of "and what now?" ("Sublime and the Avant-garde" 246).

Pointing to the effects of a degraded ecosystem, geo-political turmoil, and the financial chaos of neoliberal globalisation, Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that postmodernism's "death" has seen the emergence of what they call "metamodernism". Metamodernism oscillates between the poles of modernism and postmodernism without ever achieving any form of "balance" between the two:

[5] Broadly, the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century philosophical and aesthetic movement of modernism encompassed a reverence for "utilitarian forms and undecorated surfaces" in art and design (Crouch 619) and a similar "hard and solid imagery" in literature and poetry (Whitworth 65). Modernism married the unadorned functionalism of classical forms to an emerging sense of utopian possibility found within the now fully-fledged industrialism of modernity, thus "shaking off the legacy of traditional historical styles" (Crouch 619). To do so, it embraced the marriage of art and technology in realising its vision (620). In essence, modernism relegated history to the margins in favour of looking forward to a boundless future of technological progress, rejecting Romanticism's emphasis on the personal, particular, and emotional (Whitworth 65).

> [Metamodernism] oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naiveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity (Vermeulen and van den Akker).

These oscillations that Vermeulen and van den Akker describe attribute a profound sense of anxiety caused by "unyielding tension"—the metamodernist work operates within a framework of desire for meaning and acknowledgement that meaning, reason, and rationality are elusive at best, and absent at worst (Vermeulen and van den Akker). The authors are quick to make a link between metamodernism and Romanticism; this tension or conflict is fundamentally Romantic.

They highlight the "general idea of the Romantic as oscillating between attempt and failure (Vermeulen and van den Akker) and argue that Friedrich Schlegel's definition of Romantic irony includes such an oscillation between "enthusiasm and irony" (Vermeulen and van den Akker)—it is irony that contains its obverse, sincerity, within its very mode of expression. According to Ernst Behler, such irony is an integral part of the self-consciousness that Romanticism implies, which creates endless shifts between experience and reflection.

For Behler, Romantic irony comprises "an infinite mental spiral in which the individual mental ego hovers between naïve experiences and critical reflections on its experiences while viewing its own passions with disillusioned detachment" (43). Such an "intellectual attitude" allows the "vulnerable personality" a way to distance herself from immersive negative feelings of "melancholy, loneliness and profound suffering" while still acknowledging their reality (43). However, for Schlegel, Romantic irony is not a detriment, but a "propelling force", similar to Emerson's imaginative circles, that allows for a continual becoming and renewal (Behler 62). Still, the Romantic ironist partly resides outside of her own experiences, not wholly engaging in the immediacy of action and emotion, which signals a fragmented subject partially alienated from personal experience.

According to Fredric Jameson, this "fragmentation of the subject" is characteristic of postmodernism (Jameson 63). Indeed, in this sense postmodernism can be considered a "remoulding of Romanticism [...] a mutation of the original stock"

(Larrissy 1). If, as Lyotard does, we take postmodernism to be not an "epoch" as such (á la the "postmodern era") but a descriptive mode (Roberts 142), we can more easily consider the coexistence of different modes—the Romantic, the modern, and the postmodern—within the same text (Roberts 142). As Vermeulen and van den Akker suggest, this coexistence resonates in metamodernist works. Just as "Romantic poetry incorporates Romantic ideology as a drama of the contradictions which are inherent in that ideology" (McGann 2)—the "spontaneity and recollection in Wordsworth", the "spiritual tone" without specific religious context (Thorlby 147)—metamodernism incorporates its own contradictions, demonstrating a Romantic "working out" of those contradictions without any kind of structural resolution or synthesis.

Although they do mention two filmmakers I discuss, Jonze and Anderson, Vermeulen and van den Akker primarily elucidate the metamodernist influence in visual art and architecture. Their conclusions, however, can be readily applied to all these films, both in terms of mise-en-scène and narrative. For instance, the authors point to the structures designed by Ader and Rubsamen as employing "materials and methods" not ideally suited to their task, hypothesising that their intention is "not to fulfill it", but rather to represent an "attempt to fulfill it in spite of its 'unfulfillableness'". The architects realise structurally the failed attempt at the unity of the "good forms" of modernism (Lyotard 45)—forms that holistically serve their purpose, offering a nostalgic sense of "solace and pleasure" (Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism?" 45)—while still visualising the attempt itself. A similar conclusion can be made with the use of antiquated forms such as stop-motion animation and other practical effects in the creations of Anderson and Jonze. It also characterises the actions of a vast majority of the films' characters, who continually embark on quixotic plans and quests to fulfil desires with an air of premature defeat.

This sense of the unfulfilable links metamodernism to the paradox found in Romantic irony, which engenders simultaneous "creation and de-creation":

> The authentic romantic ironist is as filled with enthusiasm as with scepticism. Having ironically acknowledged the fictiveness of his own patterning of human experience, he romantically engages in the creative process of life by eagerly constructing new forms, new myths (Mellor 5).

For Anne Mellor, Romantic irony creates new forms and myths in order to puncture them. It acknowledges the game it is playing, but it plays it anyway, moving forward in a continuing cycle of "self-creation and self-destruction" (Behler 61) and recognition of the unending struggle that fuels imaginative power. (I discuss Romantic irony at length in chapter two.)

Metamodernism is, in essence, an attempt to traverse the gap between modernism's discredited, utopian expectations of totality—a belief in "good forms" (Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism?" 45), grand "metanarratives" of social progress (Lyotard *Postmodern Condition* xxiv), "scientistic" ideological abstraction that feigns ideological neutrality (Docherty 25), and the "fantasies of realism" (Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism?" 41)—and postmodernism's fragmenting and fracturing of them through the creation of "new myths" (Vermeulen and van den Akker).

This attempted traversal forever fails, but it is in the attempt that metamodernism wages its own war against what Jameson calls postmodernism's "waning of affect"—the obliteration of subjectivity leading to the end of "unique and personal" style and the death of feeling "since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling" (*Postmodernism* 61). In its place, it creates a new "narrative of longing" for something it can never achieve; as such "the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility" (Vermeulen and van den Akker). Metamodernism, in fact, marks a new return to a Romantic sensibility, one that grapples with the incommensurability of feeling and action, self and other. It is not merely postmodern pastiche or an arch wink towards the past from the knowing present:

> If these artists look back at the Romantic it is neither because they simply want to laugh at it (parody) nor because they wish to cry for it (nostalgia). They look back instead in order to perceive anew a future that was lost from sight. Metamodern neoromanticism should not merely be understood as re-appropriation; it should be interpreted as re-signification (Vermeulen and van den Akker).

The filmmakers in question all seem intent on such a process of re-signification. They create narratives that depict spirits in solitude moving through brave new liminal worlds of personal mythmaking in attempts at meaning-making: desperate

for intersubjective connection, unable to totally fulfil their desires, yet continuing to struggle with the re-signification of their relationships and their own identities. I now turn to an overview of the filmmakers I discuss and connect them to this theoretical framework.

From the New Wave to New Hollywood to Now

While these filmmakers have no official organising principles, they are connected to each other professionally and personally in many ways.[6] Jonze and Coppola met early in their careers (Smith) and were briefly married; Jonze directed two films from scripts written by Kaufman. They frequently use the same cast members and crew, such as actors Bill Murray and Jason Schwartzman (Anderson and Coppola), production designer KK Barrett (Jonze and Coppola), and cinematographer Lance Acord (Jonze and Coppola). They also share a similar milieu. Some, such as Coppola, finance their films independently (Thompson), but all are affiliated in one way or another with major Hollywood studios and their subsidiaries, which are sometimes referred to as "Indiewood" (King 7).

There is a neat correlation between these filmmakers and the famous "New Hollywood" filmmakers of the late 1960s and 1970s, who include, among others, Martin Scorsese, Roman Polanski, Francis Ford Coppola, Stanley Kubrick, Terrence Malick, Robert Altman, Hal Ashby, and Brian De Palma (Biskind 15). In many ways the filmmakers I discuss owe a large debt to their predecessors' institutionalisation of a "relative (but not radical) alterity" (King 31). Robert Phillip Kolker considers the New Hollywood era a fleeting period in American filmmaking when filmmakers were able to "pursue the romantic possibility that there can still be individual interventions in the homogeneity of film" (Kolker Xiii). Falling somewhere between the avant-garde and the more formally and socially

[6] I consider Michel Gondry *(Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, The Science of Sleep),* Noah Baumbach *(Frances Ha, The Squid and the Whale)* and David O. Russell *(Spanking the Monkey, I Heart Huckabees)* to be a part of this group. They also have personal and professional ties to the filmmakers I cover: Gondry directed two scripts by Kaufman, Baumbach is the screenwriting partner of Wes Anderson, and Spike Jonze appeared in Russell's 1999 film *Three Kings*. Russell has since become much more of a classical Hollywood filmmaker, with mainstream successes like *The Fighter,* although his later "screwball" comedies, such as 2012's *Silver Linings Playbook*, exhibit some of the traits of his earlier films.

conservative product of the Hollywood studio era, New Hollywood filmmakers were "unembarrassed […] to assume the mantle of the artist, nor did they shrink from developing personal styles that distinguished their work from other directors" (Biskind 15). They "maintained that directors are to movies what poets are to poems" (16), echoing the sentiments of French film critic Alexandre Astruc, who in 1948 coined the phrase *"la camera stylo"* (camera pen) in reference to a new age, or "tendency" of cinema (Astruc).

For Astruc, after decades of simply being a "fairground attraction", cinema was now "a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel" (Astruc). A director was no longer simply an "illustrator" or "presenter"; he (almost exclusively a "he" in Astruc's time, and still today) was a "film-maker/author [who] writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (Astruc). This conception of filmmaking as "personal obsession" is, of course, highly influenced by the Romantic principle of the particular "insight and vision" that was the "poet's privilege" (McGann 114). Astruc and the "auteur theory" born of his idea helped popularize the notion of film as art, and the filmmaker as an artist on par with the poet, writer of great literature, and master painter.

"Authenticity" was a watchword for New Hollywood: its actors often trained in the Method acting style (Biskind 16) and its narratives embraced character-driven stories, anti-heroes, and "challenged the tyranny of technical correctness" (17) through an embrace of European art cinema techniques (21) that flew in the face of the classical Hollywood filmmaking style (15). But while these filmmakers, who were given a heretofore unknown level of creative freedom in Hollywood, were interested in upending a studio system that was already coming crashing down around them (17), decades later, their filmic descendants maintain a much more symbiotic relationship to the commercial system. If, in 1960s and 1970s Hollywood, "Everything old was bad, everything new was good" and "nothing was sacred" (14), by the end of the twentieth century, much self-conscious filmmaking style began to look back to the past for its inspiration. It embraced a less revolutionary stance, embodying an ethos and style Brendan Kredell calls the "cinema of gentrification" (Kredell 84).

Writing in the late 1980s, Kolker declares, "[T]he brief time of the Hollywood *auteur* is gone" (xii). But his pronouncement seems premature. Now operating within a system of subsidiaries of major studios, "mini-majors" such as Focus Features, Sony Pictures Classics and Fox Searchlight (Tzioumakis 4), these filmmakers are often given a broad amount of creative control like their maverick cinematic forebears (Biskind 3). This is thanks in part to the prestige they engender (if not necessarily because of the box office receipts they garner) (King 282) and their relatively modest budgets compared to Hollywood "blockbusters". All are generally critically praised, with varying degrees of commercial success.[7] With their markers of "quality" (Tzioumakis 13), they can be considered what Yannis Tzioumakis calls "speciality" cinema (282).

Some in this group acknowledge their debt to New Hollywood, but they are just as likely, if not more so, to reference their affection for the twentieth-century European art cinema that itself inspired New Hollywood, especially in the case of Anderson. He references the French New Wave in films such as *Fantastic Mr Fox* (François Truffaut) and *Moonrise Kingdom* (Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard), and his general aesthetic owes a large debt to the wistful melancholia of Truffaut's decidedly less arch films. Coppola has said in interviews that as a teenager Godard's *A bout de souffle* was her favourite film (Festival de Cannes *Daily*). It is possible to draw a line from the *Nouvelle Vague*, champions of *politique des auteurs* and renouncers of the socially conscious, mainstream "prestige" pictures of *cinema du papa* (Caughie 35),

[7] While well regarded critically, they all have experienced ups and downs in respect to commercial revenues and audience reception. Kaufman, a hugely successful screenwriter in the 1990s, has gone on record with his continuing struggles to get his directorial projects funded (Ehrlich), especially after the dismal performance of his 2008 directorial debut, *Synecdoche, New York,* which grossed roughly $4.4 million worldwide on a reported $21 million budget. His latest film at the time of writing, 2014's Academy Award–nominated *Anomalisa,* was produced through private donations via a project-funding website before being bought by Paramount. It grossed less than $4 million and cost $8 million to produce.
Anderson experienced mid-career box office failures, such as *The Life Aquatic* and *The Darjeeling Limited*, but his most commercially successful film, 2014's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, grossed more than $170 million worldwide on a budget of $22 million. Coppola's most critically and commercially successful film was her second, 2003's *Lost in Translation*, which earned nearly $120 million worldwide on a relatively miniscule $4 million budget and for which she became only the third woman to be Academy Award–nominated for Best Director; her subsequent films have been commercial disappointments with mixed critical reception. Jonze won an Academy Award for Best Screenplay with 2014's *Her*; his biggest hit, however, was his first film as director: 1999's *Being John Malkovich*, which made back roughly double of its modest $13 million budget. His most expensive film, 2009's *Where the Wild Things Are*, cost an estimated $100 million to produce and broke even in terms of worldwide box office. (Box office sources IMDb)

to the filmmakers being considered here (the so-called "Left Bank" filmmakers, more formally daring and politically conscious, notwithstanding) (Roud 143).

The New Wave filmmakers' free-spirited personal portrayals of "solitude, aimlessness, introspection, aggression and failure" (Caughie 38) sometimes saw them accused of a "reactionary" politics (35). Their rebuke of the stuffy, melodramatic "Tradition of Quality" (Vincendeau 136) was somehow both "modernist" and "elegiac" (136), backward- and forward-looking. In much the same way, the new "neoromantic" American filmmakers infuse their films with an idiosyncratic, highly personalised subjectivity that has led to their own accusations of being "reactionary" (MacDowell 131), "tedious" and "boring" (French), or "self-satisfied" and "solipsistic" (Moats). But unlike the filmmakers of the French New Wave, they do not have a stodgy tradition to overturn so much as a Romantic tradition to rebuild.

Kaufman, the oldest filmmaker by more than a decade, is the only one of the four to have formally studied film—Anderson has a philosophy degree (Collin), Coppola learned the craft while shadowing her father on his film sets growing up (Tobias), and Jonze got his start making amateur skateboarding and BMX videos (Smith). In contrast to the "movie brats" of the 1970s (Scorsese, Coppola, Spielberg, Lucas), who all attended film school (Biskind 15), these filmmakers continue a trend emerging in the 1990s of what Jeffrey Sconce considers a scepticism of the "consecrating functions" of a formal artistic education (357).

This idea encapsulates a Romantic inclination of the more simplistic variety—a resistance to the civilising forces of society on individual expression, a belief in a Rousseauian "untutored and original genius" (Bate, "The English Romantic Compromise" 150), or perhaps a "revolutionary" upheaval of the old guard, as Truffaut himself railed against *cinema du papa* in the 1950s. However, it is difficult to consider any of these filmmakers or their films in the context of revolution. Coppola's very own *papa,* Francis Ford Coppola, made an indelible mark on the cinema, but she and her contemporaries do not appear interested in the social upheaval that often coloured the work of the elder Coppola's generation (Sconce 352). Despite their idiosyncrasies and formal inventiveness, their films are usually commercially viable, if not necessarily universally appealing.

The sobriquets applied to these films have been numerous. Variously referred to as "Quirky" cinema (MacDowell), "Smart" cinema (Sconce), the "New Sincerity" (as Warren Buckland defines it), and "Post-pop" (Mayshark), these critical appraisals mostly define the various aesthetic and thematic traits the films exhibit rather than attaching them to any underlying, unifying principle or philosophy. Instead, the films are described as having a discursive, "highly unstable […] tendency" defined mostly by tone (Perkins 14). Jeffrey Sconce writes of smart film's use of irony as one that identifies a "semiotic chasm" dividing a "structure of feeling that sees everything in quotation marks" from one that "still looks for art to equal sincerity, positivity, commitment, action and responsibility" (358).

Writing in 2002, Sconce focuses on American films of the 1990s, which he claims exhibit a commitment to "irony, black humor, fatalism, relativism and, yes, even nihilism" (Sconce 350). Fundamentally, smart films exhibit a distrust of "ultimate positions of truth or reason" (Perkins 14). Building on Sconce's thesis, Claire Perkins identifies in smart film a depiction of "post-youth" culture: a culture defined by those members of so-called "Generation X", who are "over-educated, underemployed and over-invested in popular culture" (7). Except for Kaufman, born in 1958, the filmmakers I consider are all members of this generation temporally, if not necessary descriptively. All are, in multiple ways, concerned with familial and interpersonal breakdown of a complacently bourgeois society (Sconce 358).

Sconce contends these films express an overwhelming scepticism, one informed by "a fundamental break in the narrative of 'revolutionary potential' advanced by the events and ideas of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s" (6) due to a degraded social and cultural milieu—and what Jesse Mayshark calls "a sense of domestic life as a nexus of abandonment, alienation, and frustration" (9)—that removes a search for meaning and replaces it with a myopic "interest in the politics of taste, consumerism and identity" (Sconce 358). Aesthetically, they project a "blankness"—a "sense of dampened affect"—that jibes with their disaffected worldview (358). As Perkins writes, "[T]he signature blankness of the smart film is a compelling illustration of a generation with 'nothing' to say" (Perkins 8). Both Sconce's and Perkins' conception of smart film seem incomplete, however, if not incorrect. In fairness to Sconce, some of the films he discusses, especially those of Quentin Tarantino, Neil

LaBute, and perhaps Todd Solondz, apply more to this rubric; but the "smart" impression is lacking in his assessments of Anderson's films and the "matter-of-fact surrealism" (350) of Jonze and Kaufman.

It seems obvious that not nearly so much critical attention would be paid to a certain "tendency" in American cinema if it really had "nothing" to say, nor even if it postured as such. Most if not all of these films, in fact, are about the struggle to express what that very "saying" is, to articulate a deep well of feeling frustrated by a culture of alienation that delimits a search for meaning. Sconce tellingly refers to Wes Anderson's films *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore,* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* as "bittersweet" (350). But his conception of "smart" seems to rely far more on the bitter to the detriment of the sweet. Likewise, Perkins alludes to smart film as part of a "therapy culture", which ascribes "the tendency in contemporary culture to make sense of the world through the prism of emotion" (10). This notion seems antithetical to smart films' pure adherence to the principles of ironic distance and disaffected apathy, and certainly to "dampened affect". Could it be that many (if not all) of these films are instead attempting to bridge that "semiotic chasm" between apathy and emotion, feeling and futility?

I join critics such as MacDowell and Buckland and emphatically argue yes. They are, in fact, about the struggle to create grand statements on the loss of grand narratives, even as the very idea of grand narratives seems antiquated. Warren Buckland identifies this breed of films as the "new sincerity", in contrast to the original meaning of the term as defined by Jim Collins (Collins 243). Buckland suggests that, rather than a simplistic rejection of irony and return to sincerity, as Collins suggests, the new sincerity offers a response to, not a disavowal of, postmodern irony: "in a dialectical move, new sincerity incorporates postmodern irony and cynicism; it operates in conjunction with irony" (Buckland 2). MacDowell offers a similar perspective on this tendency's ambivalent tonal register. As in Sconce's definition of smart film, MacDowell's concept of quirky cinema is based mainly on the "notoriously tricky concept" (MacDowell 2) of tone but is much more circumspect. Key to the sensibility of quirky is "a commitment to a certain comedic mode" (3). Akin to the aesthetic "blankness" of smart cinema (Sconce 359), it relies on "deadpan", which MacDowell defines as "dry, perfunctory, excessively

functional, taking a situation and line that we might expect to be made dramatic […] and downplaying them to the point of absurdity" (MacDowell 3).

Blankness and deadpan both relate to smart film's "dampening" of affect. However, for MacDowell, quirky cinema's reliance on comedic address "requires we view the fiction as simultaneously absurd *and* moving, the characters as pathetic *and* likeable, the world as manifestly artificial *and* believable" (4). The films are sincere, but just as in the late-Romantic critique of sincerity as performative, their sincerity is "best understood as a rhetorical construct rather than the 'natural' expression of inner truth implied in its traditional usage" (King 60). Authenticity is, as in the New Hollywood, of renewed importance. As Coppola says, "I don't want my movies to feel like movies […] I want them to feel like life" (Rickey). Of course, such a desire is realised by a very subjective idea of exactly how life "feels". (It is important to note the potential discrepancy between onscreen portrayals of emotion and those emotions being embodied by the spectator, an issue I address in chapters two and three.)

For Coppola and her compatriots, feeling, not mimetic reproduction, is indicative of authenticity. For MacDowell, the quirky film's sense of ironic detachment combined with "sincere emotional engagement" operates on the level where both structures of feeling are "made different" as they inform each other (MacDowell 12). Sincerity contrasted with ironic performativity is not the same thing as unquestioned sincerity, and vice versa. The simultaneous engagement with both creates an underlying sense of anxiety and uncertainty.

Like smart cinema, quirky film turns on depictions of arrested development—adults in these films often "behave like children" or are plagued by childhood trauma (9); protagonists are often "chaste romantic dreamers" (10), which—combined with mise-en-scène MacDowell sees as exemplary of the desire to conform the world into a "less chaotic, more simplified" (7) version of reality—signals a nostalgic, "quasi-magical voyage into the past […] made to appear both melancholic and comforting" (9). It is clear that MacDowell sees the films of quirky not just as pastiche and quotation "born of ironic distance" (Sconce 358), but as something much more than the sum of their quirks.

MacDowell's discussion of quirky cinema is, in many respects, an excellent starting point for a discussion of Romanticism in film, particularly the films I discuss. But it is also, again, somewhat limiting. These films depict varying levels of comic overtones and undertones, with Anderson being the most consistently deadpan as MacDowell defines it. MacDowell references films from Anderson, Jonze, and Kaufman, including the latter's directorial debut, *Synecdoche, New York* (2008). But in that film, along with Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* and *Marie Antoinette* (all of which I discuss) a tragicomic mode of "quirkiness" eventually gives way to a more purely tragic mode. The very Romantic irony that engenders deadpan is rooted in the suffering caused "by the antagonism of heart with intellect, of spontaneity with reflection, of passion with calculation, and enthusiasm with scepticism" (Behler 43). In fact, the oscillations between deadpan humour and deep feeling (or the attempted concealment of the latter with the former) are really a stylistic symptom of a greater underlying quality: pathos.

Jesse Mayshark characterises this cycle of films as "post-pop", and defines them by their allegiance not to a comic sensibility but to "a sort of self-conscious *meaningfulness"* (Mayshark 5, his emphasis). Considering the films of Anderson, Jonze, Kaufman, Coppola and others, he focuses on structures of identity, intersubjectivity, and consciousness: "Their overriding concern is a sort of yearning for connection, but one that is colored by an awareness of all the things that get in its way" (8). Mayshark sees these films as attempts to bridge the self-conscious divide between self and other, thus "transcend[ing] the boundaries of body and consciousness" (8).

While I largely agree with Mayshark's assessment, one point of contention is a critical one: his account of the film's protagonists as "at home in a complicated present" while being "emphatically not nostalgic for some simpler 'past'" (14). I argue that, far from being at home in the present, they can barely tolerate it as a concept; instead, they cope with the present by looking back toward the past. They are nostalgic for a fantasy, a simple imaginary past. This sense of nostalgia colours their quasi-conservative worldview, but it is problematized and complicated by the anxiety caused by such a fantastic recreation of the past as a guard against the always-uncertain future.

The contrast between the world we live in now versus the world in which the Romantics lived and created is often stark, especially in terms of technological advances—ones that of course allowed for the very creation of a new form of artistic expression, the cinema. But their world is also not terribly removed from our own in many ways. In the Romantic era, political revolution, the birth of modern capitalism and the Industrial Revolution created conditions of change both "profound and sweeping" (Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* 3) and "violent and inclusive" (Abrams 92), enabling the questioning of societal "progress", new modes of feeling, and how to navigate them.

This time around, geopolitical turmoil, economic globalisation found in late-period capitalism, and the "electronic revolution" situate our own times in a societal landscape of uncertainty (Botting 99, 101). Such changes "promise massive global transformations which repeat revolutionary and romantic gestures while at the same time threatening the human subject and the modernity sustaining it" (99). As Fred Botting writes, a neoromantic turn is as much a product of a desire for systemic societal and political change as it is one for self-realisation and interpersonal connection:

> The exhumation of Romanticism, the calling up of a ghost already haunting the present, constitutes another nostalgic appeal to a lost past, a gesture of mourning that recognizes a lack and vainly calls up an autonomous political agent who can resist the present state of things (103).

According to Lionel Trilling, "'postmodern' suggests a disenchantment that is final, or self-perpetuating […] the sense of a merely destructive end draws nearer" (138). Its "indifferen[ce] to what is lost" contrasts with modernism's hope for perpetual progress (144). The myth of the information age is one of transparency and instantaneous global connection, but the reality is one of "near-endless repetition" (193) and a cacophony of often-meaningless symbols.

At the conclusion of "Notes on Quirky", MacDowell calls for a deeper, more comprehensive examination of these films in the context of their use of Romantic irony, specifically noting its correlation with Schlegel's definition (14). "It is in fact unlikely that a trend as specific and widespread as the quirky *will not* tell us something about its sociohistorical moment", MacDowell writes (14, his emphasis).

He calls for his study to be viewed as the groundwork from which future research in a similar mode can "expand in different directions" (2). This thesis aims to do just that, taking established cinematic theories of the quirky, smart, new sincerity, and the like and delving further into the root causes and connections these films have in terms of style and substance, ones that I argue are fundamentally Romantic in form and vision, but specific to their own historical and cultural environment. By returning to the past, as these filmmakers have done, we can learn more about our present selves, and begin to discern a credible future that still asserts, and values, meaning.

Thesis Overview

The arguments made in this thesis are cumulative, with successive chapters building on ideas and theories previously posited. Each chapter covers a specific discourse of contemporary film studies: aesthetics (chapter one), cinematic metatextuality (chapter two), feminist criticism (chapter three), eco-criticism and animal studies (chapter four), and ethical studies (chapter five). My final chapter encompasses the totality of previous aesthetic and narrative discussions in order to place them within an overall ethical framework of the films covered. This structure allows me to trace the progression of Romantic thought and enables me to situate these works historically, while simultaneously engaging with an up-to-the-moment present. While these films exhibit the lasting traditions of the Romantic period, they are also very much a response to the preoccupations found within our own time.

I begin by elucidating the fundamental principles of Romantic aesthetics—the concepts of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque—as they relate to Wes Anderson's films *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004). Working from descriptions of the sublime and beautiful in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, I argue that both films' aesthetic components create picturesque representations through mise-en-scène that combine beauty and sublimity in varying degrees. *The Royal Tenenbaums* aesthetic paradigm is one I term the "painful picturesque", a programme that systematically develops the middle-ground eighteenth-century picturesque ideal of perfected nature by creating shabby but pleasing, controlled yet chaotic visual systems in the urban pastoral

environment of a fantasy New York City. While the overall aesthetic of the film is one of the picturesque, it is not the picturesque traditionally designed to create a sense of cohesion and human power through artificially perfected natural environments. Instead, the film creates a sensation that something is not quite "right"—a signal that the beautiful forms of modernism are being undermined by corroded personal-historical traumas that threaten to overwhelm good design and picturesque restraint.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou accomplishes a similar aesthetic effect, although this time the film's settings invoke the sublime more so than the beautiful, while resulting in a similar sense of picturesque anxiety. The film is set amongst natural landscapes that engender feelings of sublimity—vast oceans, weather-ravaged deserted islands and underwater environments containing terrifying, man-eating sea creatures. However, in the film these potentially sublime locales are undercut by the film's commitment to creating pleasurable, non-threatening images that coincide with a deadpan style. Human frailty and vanity, not natural might, is the ultimate terror in the film, and while nature eventually shows the film's protagonist in sublime awe, it is an awe that engenders a psychic healing rather than fear. I refer to this as the "sentimental sublime": sublimity that is defanged and contained, but causes anxiety nonetheless.

In chapter two, I argue that Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) creates a metatextual relationship between director and protagonist through its use of Romantic irony. The film directly addresses issues of solipsism, as it is told from the radically subjective viewpoint of its self-obsessed protagonist, the "genius" theatre director Caden Cotard, who may or may not be descending into madness. Kaufman conjures sublime feeling in the spectator through aesthetic devices of fantastic world creation. These include the creation of mise en abyme—engendered by various life-size recreations of New York City built inside of a large warehouse that is itself inside the "actual" New York City—and an engagement with Tzvetan Todorov's fantastic "themes of the self" (Todorov 109) and "themes of vision" (122), which are expressed by inexplicable narrative elements such as a continually burning house fire. Drawing on German idealism and Schlegel's concept of Romantic irony to counteract traditional notions of mimetic realism, Kaufman portrays his film world

(and the world itself) as chaotic. But whereas Kaufman's film embraces the chaos of becoming inherent in Schlegel's philosophy, its protagonist suffers from a complete inability to engage with life on any authentic level and subsequently fails as an artist.

In chapter three I address responses to the masculine subjectivity of Romantic "egotistical" sublimity, a sublime based in the self's relation to the world, with an examination of its effects on female subjectivity in Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* (1999) and Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013). Building on Kantian notions of the sublime and the imagination, the Romantic sublime is one traditionally predicated on the response of the "masculine" ego (Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* 3)—sublimity has its source in the internal mental faculties of reason via imagination and is not something that exists in the empirical world. This purely subjective version of sublimity was reserved for the province of masculine imagination, while the feminine, apparently lacking similar imaginative power, is relegated to the lesser realm of the social and the beautiful.

Both films approach the sublime on the level of intersubjective emotional discourse. Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* creates a film world where the expression of emotion is constantly thwarted by gender and class hypocrisy—characters in the film fail to communicate despite undercurrents of deep feeling. The film engages with the egotistical sublime in its idealised aesthetic portrayal of a group of teenage girls, who serve as objects of sublimity for the local teenage boys. However, it also portrays a reverence for a "feminine" or "everyday" sublime by valorising a feminine aesthetic Rosalind Galt terms the "pretty". Ultimately it creates an ambivalent presentation of this femininity through dreamlike yet kitsch imagery of the girls, which speaks not only to the celebration of femininity but also to its commodification and degradation.

Jonze's *Her* also engages in both modes of the egotistical and feminine sublimes, but its outcomes are much more optimistic. The film addresses the philosophical problem of "other minds", that is, the idea that we can never truly know what another thinks or feels because we are too trapped in our own subjectivity. This crisis leads the film's protagonist, the lonely writer Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix), to

withdraw from life into a cocoon of imaginative solipsism. When he meets his operating system Samantha (Scarlett Johansson), an entirely artificial intelligence who has no corporeal form, she becomes an object of sublimity for him, activating his imagination and allowing him to access long-supressed emotion. Eventually, however, Samantha embraces her own version of the sublime, a feminine one, when she leaves Theodore to enter into an ecstatic communal state with other operating systems. She becomes the subject of sublimity, even while serving as an object of the Romantic sublime for Theodore, who finally begins to regain his power as a writer due to his experience. The film's final images suggest that such a feminine sublime can be accessible to humans if we exercise imaginative will and empathy in our relations toward others, regardless of the fact that we can never really know existence outside of our own consciousness.

In chapter four, I discuss the ideological framework of Anderson's *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009). The film, an adaptation of Roald Dahl's beloved children's book, addresses various Romantic conceptions of childhood, personal and cultural history, and the natural world in relation to the self and subjectivity. In his reimagining of Dahl's story, Anderson exhibits a disdain for the mechanization of the societal landscape and the beings inhabiting it, similar to a course charted by Henry David Thoreau in *Walden,* while also optimistically suggesting that animal/human "nature" can still survive through aesthetic and ideological compromise and creative genius. In a sense he creates a brand of ideological pastoralism to match the aesthetic pastoralism/picturesque of many of his film worlds. While the anxiety portrayed in his earlier films remains, it is somewhat defused by an anarchic yet collaborative spirit.

In my final chapter I address Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006) in relation to personal subjectivity and excess, including Jeffrey Cane Robinson's notion of poetic "fancy" and, again, Rosalind Galt's idea of the cinematic "pretty". If the filmmakers I discuss have been accused of an apolitical solipsism, *Marie Antoinette* directly engages with this idea at the level of narrative (its protagonist, despite being a political figure, is unconcerned with politics and spends most of her time in a dreamlike fantasy world) and aesthetics (its depiction of material excess through surface sensation).

Coppola's emphasis on sensation and surfaces elicits what Keats refers to as the "material sublime" (Keats 237), an engagement with sensory excess, rather than the bounded subjectivity that the Romantic sublime invokes. But in *Marie Antoinette* Coppola also introduces a subjectivity that is not present in *The Virgin Suicides*. Ultimately, her protagonist's bulwark of sensory pleasure is stripped away, along with its attendant aesthetic function, signalling not just Marie-Antoinette's maturation but also her imminent death. In Coppola's film, "growing up" entails pain and suffering, as it does in life. All the filmmakers I discuss, in one form or another, suggest that it also signals a fundamental loss—the separation of self from world, and the renouncement of the joys and pleasures of connection.

I

Beauty Among the Ruins: The Painful Picturesque and Sentimental Sublime in *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *The Life Aquatic*

How pleasant, as the sun declines, to view
The spacious landscape change in form and hue!
–William Wordsworth, "An Evening Walk, Addressed to a Young Lady" (1793)

I begin by outlining the key aesthetic concepts I engage throughout this thesis. Principally I focus on the sublime, as both an aesthetic presentation and an emotion elicited by such presentation, and what is in many ways its inverse, beauty. In terms of aesthetics, the theories of Edmund Burke (b.1729–d.1797) were profoundly influential in shaping Romantic philosophy in relation to both sublimity and beauty. As such, I take Burke's theories and apply them to two films from Wes Anderson, *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004).

Each film is indicative of Burkean notions of sublimity and beauty, operating on the principle of an uneasy dialectic between the two. The result, I argue, is the aesthetic creation of a "painful picturesque" (in *The Royal Tenenbaums*) and a "sentimental sublime" (in *The Life Aquatic*). These two films are emblematic of the director's entire body of work, which is often criticised as being overly reliant on aesthetics to the detriment of story and character. However, while I agree that Anderson's films exhibit a preoccupation with aesthetics, I contend that the aesthetic modes he creates function as an underlying expression of anxiety and are not simply empty depictions of the filmmaker's personal creative fetishes—although they do evince an attitude of emotional distance toward the spectator due to their heightened artificiality.

In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Anderson tells the story of an eccentric family coming to grips with its failed promise in a fairy-tale-like version of New York City. The sense of familial anxiety is conveyed by its slightly off-kilter aesthetic presentations of the beautiful. Anderson utilises many Burkean elements of beauty—soft and warm colour, an attention to symmetry and form—and renders them askew. While Anderson's mise-en-scène is noted for its excessively symmetrical compositions

(especially his penchant for single-point perspective shots), I argue that his framing, when combined with object placement, costuming, camera movement and overall production design, asserts a sort of division between actuality and presentation. His film worlds are more haphazard than they seem, even as they appear tyrannically constructed. The result is a mismatch between content and presentation, which leads to a combination of the pleasantly picturesque and the anxious, or what I call the painful picturesque. Such an aesthetic presentation is simultaneously nostalgic, melancholic, and apprehensive.

The Life Aquatic, in similar fashion, creates a schism between content and presentation, but is more concerned with depictions of sublimity. Its expansive locations, such as the open sea and weather-ravaged tropical islands, are examples of a Burkean natural sublime aesthetics. However, Anderson imbues his scenes with the aesthetics of the beautiful and an obvious artificiality. While in the former film this creates a picturesque feeling of solemnity, in the latter film (which is more comic, despite its tragic climax), it renders the sublime sentimental in its healing power. That power rests not in exaltation, but in its curative function for the film's protagonist, washed-up nature documentary director Steve Zissou. Combined, these two films from fairly early in Anderson's career serve as both an aesthetic proclamation and a philosophical treatise for the director. They are controlled but chaotic at the same time, representing both the desire for modernist unity and a postmodern sense of confusion and unease.

The Sublime, the Beautiful, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-century Aesthetics

Edmund Burke's landmark 1757 treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful,* clearly elucidates two concepts that would become integral to Romantic aesthetic philosophy. Both of these concepts hinge on notions of the passions of individual experience. In the case of the sublime, these passions excited ideas of pain and danger. According to Burke, "terrible objects" or those that "operate in a manner analogous to terror" incite the sublime, the "strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 49). This pain from terror ultimately presages the fear of the ultimate pain, death, but when experienced at a physical and

psychological remove, it enables Burke's notion of delight. When horror cannot really harm, it thrills and inspires awe instead. Such terror "fills the mind with great ideas, and the soul delights in the experience" (Monk 28). For Burke, emotion was the "keystone" of aesthetics, and the most exalted emotion was sublimity (28).

While there is pleasure involved in this form of "positive" pain, the experience of delight is not equivalent to positive pleasure (Burke 42–43). Instead notions of the beautiful revolve around such pleasure, specifically the passions of love and "sentiments of tenderness and affection" (56). While the sublime inspires awe through terror, obscurity, power and the "artificial infinite", the beautiful inspires sympathy, even pity, through the qualities of smoothness, gradual variation, "clean and fair" colours, lightness and delicateness. Beauty, like sublimity, excites passion, but it is "nearer to a species of melancholy, than to jollity and mirth" (192). The passion beauty elicits is ultimately of the terrestrial, not of the infinite.

Clearly, the sublime and the beautiful have a wide aesthetic and psychological gulf between them. While both contain conceptual elements of passion, pain, and pleasure, they are realised through antithetical means. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, an attempt to fill this aesthetic gap by synthesising key concepts of both the sublime and beautiful emerged in the Romantic idea of the picturesque. According to Uvedale Price's *Essays on the Picturesque* (1794–1810), the concept "corrects the languor of beauty, or the tension of sublimity" (Price 89). Instead, it offers an aesthetic middle ground, one that combines the thrills of sublimity with the peaceful pleasures of beauty. Price's concept of the picturesque supplements "roughness with irregularity and 'sudden variation'," which produces "the variety, intricacy, and 'partial concealments' that arouse our curiosity" (Jarvis 181). Whereas the sublime offers concealment and obscurity, and the beautiful clarity and pleasure, the picturesque is situated somewhere between the two.

It is this more "nostalgic" and "conservative" (Jarvis 183) aesthetic that informs much of Anderson's oeuvre. Rife with imaginative subjectivity, Anderson's work is associated with stylistic overabundance, a fascination with objects and ephemera (particularly that of childhood) and idiosyncratic, off-kilter fantasy worlds. Critics often point to these overly artificial, archly constructed worlds as detrimental to the

emotional participation of the viewer, deriding them as twee, escapist, distancing or simply self-indulgent.[8] According to the *New York Times*, "Humanism lies either beyond [Anderson's] grasp or outside his range of interests" (Scott). The *Guardian* writes, "One can't shake the sense that in some respects Wes Anderson's greatest production is Wes Anderson himself, and that his grand body of work might best be read as a kind of romantic reconfiguration of his own life and the people in it" (Brooks). In *Slate,* Joshua Weiner refers to Anderson as "obnoxious", and suggests "he pins actors into the centers of fastidiously composed tableaux like so many dead butterflies" (Weiner). In his review of *The Royal Tenenbaums,* A.O. Scott hammers home the point: "This gallery of portraits, this array of handmade figurines lovingly placed in shoe box dioramas, fails to coalesce into anything resembling drama" (Scott).

Not everyone is so dismissive of the director's idiosyncratic charms, however. Reviews of *The Royal Tenenbaums* were generally positive, and it earned Anderson his first Academy Award nomination, for Best Screenplay, which he shared with co-writer Owen Wilson. The *New Yorker*'s Anthony Lane describes its tone favourably as "a steady gleam, rimmed in darkness, and only a blink away from mad" (Lane). *Sight and Sound* calls it "an exhilarating experience, a real jungle gym for the imagination" (Romney), and *Film Comment* describes it as the "film of the year", referring to Anderson as "the most original presence in film comedy since Preston Sturges" (Jones). Describing the modus operandi of the Romantic artist, Manohla Dargis declares Anderson "an authentic original—an eccentric and heretical talent" in her review (Dargis). Still, it is beyond doubt that many critics consider Anderson's work overly fanciful, idealised and too esoteric for its own good. It does not deal in *reality*, per se, but reality as seen through the eyes of an exacting and singular imagination.

[8] Anderson's work is so widely known for its idiosyncrasy and unique point of view it has also become ripe for pop-culture parody. A 2013 video from the satirical website *The Onion,* "Wes Anderson Reteams with Favorite Objects for 'Grand Budapest Hotel'," mocks his obsession with a mise-en-scène overstuffed with historical objects. His hermetic and obsessive world creation is also lampooned in a *Saturday Night Live* short film from the same year, "The Midnight Coterie of Sinister Intruders". Billed as "a tale of handmade horror", it skewers his preciousness by imagining his version of a home-invasion "slasher" film, a play on the very idea that his style automatically renders comic any notion of sublime terror.

Some of the criticism applied to Anderson is reminiscent of the assessment of writers in the Romantic era. According to Seamus Perry, "The charge of escapism has always been made against the proponents of subjective idealism and the 'world within'" (Perry 8). While M.H. Abrams insists this perception is a "peculiar injustice" (Abrams "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" 101), Jerome McGann acknowledges this penchant for escapism as both "a critical gesture, an attack upon the present meanness" of the world (McGann 35) and "the reflex of the circumstances in which their work, their lives, and their culture were all forced to develop" (117). In other words, the Romantics were a product of their own cultural milieu and historical era as much as they were creators of it. Similarly, Anderson's idealism and escapism is similarly as much a product of the anxiety of postmodernity (or late modernity) as it is an expression of ego or an escape into flights of fancy.

Anderson's mise-en-scène engenders both an emotional distance, through its artificiality, and a physical one, through its framing. Such distance impedes any sense of true sublimity in Burke's sense. According to Jean-François Lyotard, "intensification" and not "elevation" is key to Burke's notions of the sublime (Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-garde" 251), creating the "shock effect" (249) of an "entirely spiritual passion" (251). Anderson's films exhibit tension, especially between pleasure and pain, but their lack of intensity in emotional presentation through distancing effects turns shock and passion into fanciful, melancholic pseudo-nostalgia.

Principally, Anderson's films represent a longing to embrace the past in their self-conscious "exhumation" (Botting 103) of Romantic aesthetics and feeling. Fred Botting characterises such an exhumation as "a gesture of mourning that recognizes a lack and vainly calls up an autonomous political agent who can resist the present state of things" (103). Certainly, this feeling of mourning permeates all of Anderson's films, both literally (someone in the main cast dies or mourns the death of loved one) and figuratively, through overall emotional presentation. Such mourning calls up the past in order to alleviate the pain of living in postmodern "indeterminacy" (Lyotard 247), the state of ahistoricity that makes it impossible to grasp the "now" because there is no "final understanding" of history and

representation (Elam 10). The "master narrative" of history has been de-legitimised, and the present itself becomes untethered from a sense of historical progression (11).

Anderson's films can be seen as a nostalgic grappling with the loss of grand narratives by replacing them with obviously fictitious re-imaginings of history as particular, personal, idiosyncratic and even contradictory. This alleviation is never entirely successful, however, likely due to the acknowledgment of its own fiction. Ultimately it creates something just shy of modernism's goal of shaping the world into "good forms" in the tradition of Enlightenment reason (Docherty 6). In such a modernist view, "the multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter" (Docherty 6). According to Thomas Docherty, within the postmodern, the ideals of modernity are as far-fetched as Anderson's fantastic tableaux. Instead, "we are condemned to live in a present, and adopting a specific—some have said 'schizophrenic'—mood as a result of acknowledging that this present is characterized by struggle or contradiction and incoherence" (Docherty 3).

Indeed, the tension created in Anderson's mise-en-scène can be considered a "schizophrenic" one (in the purely colloquial sense that Docherty uses it): its sense of order that does not strictly adhere depicts a desperation to make sense of the world while acknowledging that the notion is simply an impossibility. Anderson's work is "metamodern" (Vermeulen and van den Akker) in its depiction of a longing for unity and its acceptance of the inconclusive. As such, the "pervasive cynicism" (Waugh 5) of postmodernism is transformed into a fantastic reimaging of the progressive ideal, but one that understands it is indulging in a fantasy.

While Anderson's first two features, *Bottle Rocket* (1996) and *Rushmore* (1998), exhibited many of the aesthetic predilections that would become staples in his later films, it was not until 2001's *The Royal Tenenbaums* that his realist-fantastical sensibility became fully realised. This is primarily due to that film's world creation through mise-en-scène, which produces a sense of both picturesque tranquillity and postmodern anxiety.

The Royal Tenenbaums and the "Painful Picturesque"

The picturesque has its roots in eighteenth-century English landscape design, later adopted by landscape painters such as John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough and eventually the English Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth. In his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes extensively in favour of pleasure (whose source is beauty), but also advocates for the combining of "low and rustic […] situations from common life" with "a certain colouring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way" (Wordsworth 115). The ordinary becomes embedded within the imaginary, attaining a fresh level of excitement, but still possessing identifiable emotion.

According to Robin Jarvis, picturesque landscape "was made to tell a story or suggest a meaning via the presence of buildings, statues, and inscriptions, lending the garden a theatrical as well as pictorial dimension" (185). Unlike the strict regularity and purely unnatural formality of the French classicism that came before it, this theatricality was characterised by irregularity, contrast, roughness, "kinship to the real world", variety, use of light and shade and novelty (Mohr 245). The picturesque mandate was, in essence, dominance over nature (248), but not in the cataclysmic sense of industrialism. Instead it expressed a reverence for the natural as a force for psychological healing.

Suitably, the landscapes that appear in *The Royal Tenenbaums*—notably cemeteries, but also city parks and gardens trapped mostly within the confines of a fabled version of New York City—are rustic and often in a state of decay, but are primarily of a strongly designed nature. Its key location, however, is manmade: the Tenenbaum family residence. A character in and of itself, the impressively foreboding structure dominates its surroundings. In fact, with its neo-Gothic stone edifice and castle-like spire, the building is so grand there is almost no space left for surrounding landscape. Instead, Anderson shifts the world of nature to inside the home, which becomes a picturesque combination of the theatrical and the organic, at once alive itself but also frozen in time.

In the film, nature is ossified and put on display. From the neutered wildness of Margot Tenenbaum's jungle-themed play to Royal Tenenbaum's "Wild Javelena" mounted head, it becomes one more component of individual imagination in the historical narrative of a family, one that is in danger of dissolving under the weight of expectation. The tragi-comic story of a cosmopolitan family once celebrated for its wunderkind children, who have all failed to live up to societal and familial expectations in adulthood, *The Royal Tenenbaums* reveals the ideals of modernism to be impeachable fantasies through its character and mise-en-scène.

Figure 1.1 The Tenenbaum mansion is majestic and imposing, but like the family that lives in it, it shows signs of crumbling grandeur.

At first foreboding, the massive, five-story stone edifice of the mansion—almost castle-like with its jutting spire and family insignia flag—appears as a grand yet crumbling beauty, a mythical anachronism on a fictitious street, Archer Avenue (figure 1.1). But this visual reference to Gothic erosion belies the intellectual and creative vigour permeating the inside of the home early in the film, which is reflected by its interiors. First seen in flashbacks, the inside of the house is warm, inviting, and full of life. High-key lighting illuminates almost every corner, reflecting the children's brightness and casting a nostalgic glow on the visually overwhelming paraphernalia and ephemera of layer upon layer of family history and creative output.

The overabundance of visual information creates a subtle disorientation because not all of it can be absorbed. In Burke's terminology, this creates a feeling of obscurity, where "the mind is hurried out of itself, by a croud of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused" (Burke 88). That feeling of disarray is misleading, however. The mise-en-scène is engineered to create a sense of confusion, even as it is meticulously composed. The sense of personal history attached to the setting is evident: aging throw rugs lie about seemingly haphazardly covering floorboards already worn down by a thousand small footsteps; dozens of framed children's drawings line almost every available inch of the salmon pink walls; Royal's missing stuffed "Wild Javelena" head leaves a visible trace of itself behind (figure 1.2).

Variations of pink, a colour emblematic of the family and its overwhelming ties to the house, dominate. Vivid pink is used as a neutral in the film, and the colour is, for Burke, representative of the beautiful (Burke 180). For Burke, "clear and fair colours […] light greens; soft blues; weak whites; pink reds; and violets" are the ideal colours of beauty, and if colour is "strong and vivid" is must be varied (180). Despite the pink's vividness in the film, whenever it is in danger of overwhelming the frame, as in the hallway and main stairwell of the home, it is broken up by various objects, creating the Wordsworthian ideal of tempering passion with an "overbalance of pleasure" (Wordsworth, *Preface* 127).

Each of the Tenenbaum children is linked to their own specific room in the house. Their personal idiosyncrasies strongly inform the production design, so that each space becomes emblematic of character. Through an opening flashback montage we are introduced to Margot (Gwyneth Paltrow), Richie (Luke Wilson), and Chas (Ben Stiller) in their bedrooms. Compared with the size and stateliness of the home's grand ballroom, the children's rooms are small and cloistered. Of the three children, adopted daughter Margot's room—which features blood-red wallpaper with a zebra motif and tribal-style masks on the walls—is the most evocative of the sublime.

Figure 1.2 The house's interiors exhibit familial connections through objects; even disappeared items leave behind historical traces.

During her introduction, we see Margot as a child, dressed as a zebra in one of her early plays. Richie and Chas both portray predator animals (a bear and a tiger) while Margot is relegated, by her own design, to playing a conquered prey animal,[9] a zebra complete with hand-crafted arrow "holes" in its gut. According to Burke, the relationship between the strength of a beast and its sublimity depends on context. Certain animals of brute strength, such as oxen and other beasts of burden, have been domesticated and as a result can never be sublime. Instead, the sublime is found "in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther or rhinoceros" (Burke 94). Pointedly, these animals' sublimity lies not only in their physical force, but also in their unpredictability and inscrutability. That Margot chooses to portray a zebra (exotic, wild, yet non-threatening) reveals her understanding of her circumstances, even as a young child. The sole adopted sibling, Margot is treated virtually as an interloper in her own family, something akin to an exotic pet, by her father, Royal (Gene Hackman). Later Margot and Richie run away and spend the night in the "African Wing of the Public Archives". Among the stuffed creatures of the savannah, defanged of their danger, she feels most at home.

[9] The theme will be echoed in 2012's *Moonrise Kingdom,* when the pre-teen Suzy Bishop appears in a play costumed as a raven—she enjoys a bit more freedom even as she brings to mind a sort of mini-Margot. It also speaks to Anderson's relating of children in general to wild creatures or, at times, "savages", while simultaneously imbuing them with preternatural abilities and intelligence. I address this idea further in chapter four.

The adult Margot, replaying childhood patterns of behaviour like all the emotionally stunted Tenenbaum children, is similarly trapped. When we first see her as an adult, she is framed by jungle-like foliage on the wallpaper in a beauty salon (figure 1.3), where the shaping of her sublime excess can be transformed into something purely pleasing. Supremely secretive, she spends hours alone holed up in her bathroom "cage", where she feels most comfortable away from prying eyes.

Through a private investigator, we learn that Margot has spent some time in the actual jungle, trading in her mundane existence for a sexual dalliance with a tribal chief. Here, Anderson lampoons the early Romantic primitivist trope of the "noble savage" (more on this in chapter four). But the scene also illustrates that even a partially wild creature is still capable of sublimity by "insisting on its freedom" (Burke 95). Pulled in multiple directions by the men in her life—from her needy lover Eli Cash;[10] to her disapproving husband, Raleigh (Bill Murray); to her narcissistic father, Royal—she panics like a trapped animal and insists on breaking paternal and patriarchal chains.

Figure 1.3 The film's mise-en-scène links Margot Tenenbaum to images of wildness, exoticism, and performative beauty.

[10] Anderson seems to particularly enjoy skewering the "wild man" persona of the macho, Hemingway-esque author in the form of Cash, who the "Sunday Times Magazine" supplement shown in the film calls "The James Joyce of the West". Despite his "manly" fetishes, in many respects Eli is the inverse of Margot—while he desperately playacts his virile, sublime fantasies, deep down he is still a hapless private school boy desperate to belong. His magazine cover, in which he comically poses shirtless while donning his trademark cowboy hat and hoisting snakes in both hands, is just one of many visual punch lines made at his expense. It turns out he personally sent a copy to Etheline for her approval. "He sends me all his clippings," she tells a horrified Margot. Eli's tragi-comic sense of wildness is clearly conveyed as inauthentic, unlike Margot's.

Margot's mask-like facial expressions link her own face to the primitivism of the masks on her wall. In her reading of Agnes Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), Elizabeth Ezra argues that masks "inhabit a metaphorical space of disguise, censorship, and displacement" (Ezra 177). According to Ezra, "in *Cléo* and other New Wave films, masks appear as overdetermined memorial palimpsests, signifying multiple layers of historical trauma as well as the repression of these traumas in a dialectic of exposure and concealment" (Ezra 177–178). Margot's desire for both concealment (in her purposeful hiding of herself and her habits, such as a lifetime of smoking) and exposure (through her various sexual encounters and travels) can perhaps be linked to the trauma she experiences from being seen as an abandoned stray taken in by an indifferent owner.

Figure 1.4 Richie instructs Etheline to hang his portrait of Margot in a seemingly haphazard place on the wall of the ballroom.

"Masks act as monuments bearing silent witness to the legacy of objectification" on the basis of race or gender, writes Ezra (180). While I do not mean to suggest that Anderson is interested in a critique of gender politics and corporeal objectification, Margot's wayward adventures, while apparently unfulfilling, speak to her connection to a sublime wildness that her beauty belies. She is the ultimate symbol of picturesque anxiety in *The Royal Tenenbaums,* and even perhaps in Anderson's entire oeuvre to date. But, like Richie's eagle Mordecai, she eventually returns, controlled as much by her longing for acceptance as her desire to be free.

When Margot dons her brown fur coat, it serves as a reminder of that duality, indicative of the harnessing of wild nature to achieve an aesthetic societal value. The anxiety caused by that tension is never resolved, a fact made explicit when Richie reveals to Margot his sublimely terrifying post-suicide wounds. No resolution, no picturesque "unity" will be achieved.

While purposeful and plentiful object placement is crucial to Anderson's mise-en-scène, at once creating a sense of overabundance and endless variation within a solid foundation of precise composition, a lack of uniformity often arises. When young Richie instructs his mother, Etheline (Anjelica Huston), to hang his childish painting of Margot on a wall in the grand ballroom, already littered with similar portraits, he picks an area that creates far too much space between it and the other images, which are clustered close together (figure 1.4). Not only does this represent Richie's slightly off-kilter sensibility, it creates a feeling of purposeful haphazardness. A picturesque sensibility is achieved, but to an ever-so-slightly anxious effect. Here, "that sinking, that melting, that languor" (Burke 191) that so characterises the beautiful is transformed into something that incites pleasure but also excites curiosity, the "chief mental effect of the picturesque" (Jarvis 181) with its destabilising lack of uniformity.

While the film painstakingly catalogues Richie's vast array of personal objects in his bedroom (endless trophies, a drum set, toy cars, a veritable explosion of tennis balls), zigzagged carpeting in a dusky dark blue and shocking green is revealed, clashing violently with the walls and creating a sense of aesthetic anxiety. These hints of the sublime break through the theatrically composed space, as they do eventually during Richie's suicide attempt, which is shot in purposeful discontinuity. Jump cuts of Richie slashing his wrists are juxtaposed with his voice-over declaring, "I'm going to kill myself tomorrow", evoking a sublime sense of confusion in its irrational use of time and space. The scene's colour change eliminates the tonal warmth of the normal milieu (figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5 A sublime point-of-view shot of Richie's bleeding wrists offers a counterpoint to Anderson's penchant for pleasantly constructed overhead shots of static objects.

While Anderson's penchant for warm and soft colours and light is pleasurably nostalgic, the sense of physical distance between the camera and characters creates a subsequent sense of emotional distance for the spectator, in another relation of the picturesque.

Trapped in a Never-ending Play: Anderson's Use of Diegetic Space

William Kent, a highly influential eighteenth-century garden designer, created landscapes organised around "a series of vistas, each of which seems to be a part of a landscape painting" a chief goal of which was "to create, artificially and artistically, variety, openness, distance, and space" (Mohr 249). The idea of the picturesque landscape was to invoke a painting that a visitor could literally walk through and experience in all its three-dimensional aesthetic splendour. While Anderson embraces the ideas of the picturesque with his predilection for variety,

openness, and highly textural surfaces with a rustic, often naïve quality, his use of distance and space within the frame problematizes this relation.

Anderson mostly chooses to film in deep focus, sharply capturing every small detail in frames usually overflowing with them. (Cinematographer Robert Yeoman has shot all of Anderson's films to date except *Fantastic Mr Fox*.) Wide-angle lenses create a bowing, "fish-eye" effect around the corners of the frame, often lending the appearance that the image is being stretched to the point of rupture. But instead of having his action create several different vistas in a shot, as in famous examples of deep-focus cinematography in Orson Welles' oeuvre,[11] he often relegates his characters to a linear plane in the camera's middle distance, usually at eye level, creating a shallower, even theatrical, space. Consequently, the space becomes at once cacophonous—bursting with objects and people—and meticulously composed within the frame to create a *feeling* of chaos and overabundance, but one strictly catalogued and accounted for.

Anderson is preoccupied with theatricality, both in form and content. (Many of his films feature characters mounting plays within the larger narrative.) That theatricality is indicative of flatness in both presentation and affect. According to Fredric Jameson, the postmodern heralds "the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (Jameson, "Postmodernism" 60). Whereas the Romantic picturesque garden sought to create a space full of three-dimensionality, where an observer could move through the space psychologically as well as physically, Anderson chooses to hold the observer at a remove, refusing a clear entry point into the action. In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, this is most technically apparent in the complicated long-take tracking shot that caps the film's denouement (figure 1.6). His aerial camera cranes smoothly through the scene from left to right, often zooming in on characters in two shots or group shots, but never taking us into the action so we feel a part of it.

---

11 The title of Anderson's film is an indirect reference to Welles' own *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), a film that, as Matt Zoller Seitz points out in his essay "The Substance of Style", offers repeated inspiration for Anderson (Seitz). For instance, both films include a palatial family home, third-person narration, and "a sense of collective anxiety born of the feeling that time has passed a once-important family by and the community knows it" (Seitz).

David Bordwell refers to this flattening of perspective as “planimetric composition”, a style of shooting that became popular in the 1960s through its use in the work of various New Wave filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Jean-Luc Godard (Bordwell, “Shot Consciousness”). These “painterly” and “strongly pictorial” approaches to composition can suggest a “childish simplicity” or an oppressiveness that denotes “stiff ceremony” (Bordwell). Anderson’s compositions, as do so many of his aesthetic and narrative devices, fall somewhere in between. Their childlike sense of play and whimsy in colour, visual jokes and overabundance belies their heavily constructed formalism.

According to Bordwell, “the static, geometrical frame can evoke a deadpan comic quality”, but in Anderson’s case it also creates a sense of the film’s characters being trapped in a self-perpetuating play. Editing and camera movement serve to heighten the effect: whip-pans, tilts, and fast zooms alter the shots while keeping the integrity of the space, while shot-reverse shot editing of planimetric compositions (rather than “classical” over-the-shoulder cutting), maintain its flatness.

Figure 1.6 An elaborate long-take tracking shot at the end of the film features scenes with almost all major characters but never delves into the action.

James MacDowell derides the "excessive neatness" in Anderson's mise-en-scène (MacDowell 5), but I think this misses the point. While his camera indeed conveys a strong precision and formalism, this is often combined with calculated disarray within the frame. The result exemplifies controlled chaos. In terms of camera movement, Anderson often combines static, painterly composed shots with sequences of wild, almost anarchic movement. The purest example of such controlled chaos is his use of whip pans, where the camera moves so quickly the image blurs, only to land precisely in focus and perfectly timed on an actor so he or she can deliver a deadpan bon mot. In conversation scenes, the camera often ping-pongs in such a fashion between two or more characters, resulting in a vertiginous experience for the viewer that is nonetheless succinct and easy to follow. These scenes are interspersed with excessively "stagey" shots that treat cinematic space as if it were theatre performance.

Anderson's obsession with the proscenium reaches its apex when, in films like *The Life Aquatic* and *The Darjeeling Limited* (2008) he constructs bisected sets, portraying the action of several locations in tableaux reminiscent of doll's houses or children's dioramas (figure 1.7). While Godard and other earlier, more avant-garde filmmakers have used this technique to create a sense of Brechtian distance (Nagib 534), Anderson, while equally self-reflexive, seems to function out of urgency to control, to exert his dominance over nature. But that control is a self-aware attempt in futility—as Michael Chabon notes, these sets become "scale models" of the jigsaw puzzle of life, "mysterious, original, unbroken, half-remembered" (22).

Figure 1.7 The bisected set of *The Life Aquatic*'s *Belafonte*

Like artist Joseph Cornell's boxed assemblages, "[they make] explicit […] the yearning of a model-maker to analogize the world, and at the same time […] frankly emphasize the limitations, the confines, of his or her ability to do so" (23). That yearning, of course, is a desire for meaning, which postmodernism implicitly rejects.

A Search for Meaning Within Postmodern Pastiche

Fredric Jameson defines the "hysterical sublime" as the delight caused by becoming immersed in a cacophony of images and signs without any specified meaning, a combination of Burke's ideas and Immanuel Kant's notions of the sublime that followed (Jameson, "Postmodernism" 76). For Kant "the object of the sublime is now not only a matter of sheer power and the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature" as it was for Burke, "but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces" (Jameson, "The Sublime and the Avant-garde" 77). That is, the sublime invokes the power of the "unpresentable" (Lyotard 79). For the artist, the question becomes how to present such unpresentability. Embodied by Susan Sontag's notions of camp (which I discuss later on in this chapter), a postmodernist interpretation of the sublime answers this crisis of representation with a deluge of barely differentiated sensory phenomena—it celebrates the "limits of figuration" with the intensity, euphoria and "hallucinatory exhilaration" (Jameson 76) of countless deconstructed and decontextualized images and experiences.

By themselves these sensory experiences mean almost nothing, but together they result in an act of emancipatory abandon, something akin to Burke's sublime awe, creating a world that "thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density" (77). Anderson's version of this skin-like cacophony, while certainly glossy, depthless, and inherently filmic, can be seen as the hysterical sublime's more conservative sibling. A hermetically sealed world, we experience it as an outsider, the cacophony presented at a remove that robs it of its euphoric immediacy. Its pleasures are always underscored with anxiety and disunity, but never at the price of their coherence. There is no *rush* in Anderson's worlds; their design is too apparent, and they are imbued with too much meaning. Sometimes a sense of danger is evoked, as in the

pirate raid on Zissou's ship in *The Life Aquatic* (which features a rare use of hand-held camera), but more often what would be thrilling under ordinary circumstances, such as the subsequent raid on Little Ping Island in the same film, the result is more comic spectacle.

Expressions of kitsch and the mingling of "high" and "low" culture—or, more specifically, the raising of low to high—is prominent in postmodern pastiche (Perloff 186), and can be seen throughout *The Royal Tenenbaums*, from Eli's drug runs to the "375th Street Y" to Royal and Richie (and later Royal and his grandsons) gambling with street toughs, shot from a low-level camera while crouching to underscore the point of upper-class slumming. Similarly, there is a reverence for decay among grandeur throughout the mise-en-scène, which portrays the rustic picturesque in an urban setting. Surfaces and objects are marked with the patina of decay: stone and brick crumble, paint peels off walls in chunks, paperback covers appear weathered by age, and anachronisms abound. Technology is out-dated or even obsolete, as in Raleigh's reel-to-reel tape recorder and Margot's rotary telephone. Ramshackle "Gypsy Cab Company" taxis are omnipresent, and feature rusted-out fenders and missing window glass patched with cardboard.

But Anderson's form of pastiche is not just a postmodern "random cannibalization" of the past (Jameson 65–66); here the age and the history of objects are inextricably linked to the history of characters, even if they predate those characters. Jean-François Lyotard describes the form of the sublime found in modernism:

> [M]odern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure (Lyotard 45).

Such consistency is rendered in the film's depiction of the historical, both real and fictive, which lends the story the sense that it is part of an overarching passage of time. Royal's residence at the "Lindberg Palace Hotel" is actually the modernist Waldorf Astoria, "the grand commercial hotel of the 1930s and 1940s" (Perloff 197), which further links the Tenenbaums to a modernist grand narrative that has

been rendered obsolete. It is clear why Etheline is an archaeologist, and why her fiancé Henry (Danny Glover) is an accountant—the accounting of personal and family history is a key project of the film.

The "love of the particular" is highly Romantic (Wu 4), and it is found in the exhaustive cataloguing of ephemera that Anderson shows in his mise-en-scène. Such ephemera is extremely subjective and even imaginary. Brendan Kredell sees the use of imaginary space in the film as a form of gentrification. According to Kredell, "Anderson prevents the city from asserting its own identity, choosing instead to treat it as a location within which to construct his own social universe" (84–5). But surely the film isn't about asserting the identity of a location; instead, it concerns how a location is *informed by* personal identity, both those of its characters and that of Anderson himself. The film creates a nostalgic tone of regret and mournfulness for the loss of something that never actually existed, just like the apocryphal Gypsy Cab Company taxis and 375th Street Y in Anderson's fictional New York. This is authenticity in the Romantic sense: an assertion of inner imagination on external spaces.

In Anderson's follow-up film, he creates a similar tone of nostalgia for an imaginary past, one built on the legendary status of its hero, Steve Zissou. Even more so than *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Life Aquatic* purposefully undercuts ideas of rationality and fidelity to truth in its depictions of scientific exploration, highly stylised "natural" flora and fauna, and questions of personal identity.

The Middle-aged Man and the Sea: *The Life Aquatic* and the Sentimental Sublime

Anderson's 2004 film *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* follows an aging, somewhat hapless Jacques Cousteau–like explorer (Bill Murray) on his quest for revenge against the mythical shark who "ate" his partner. While doing so, he grapples with a career on the decline and the discovery of a possible illegitimate adult son. The film's milieu of the open sea provides an unprecedented opportunity for Anderson to immerse himself in Romantic ideas of the natural world.

Whereas *The Royal Tenenbaums* takes place in a hermetic urban environment, settings in *The Life Aquatic* are expansive. European locations fill in for exotic locales, such as "Port-au-Patois"—a fictitious island oasis obviously meant to conjure Haitian capital Port-au-Prince—Little Ping Island, another imaginary enclave in the Caribbean made uninhabitable by the ravages of weather, and even the arctic, glimpsed in Steve's nature documentaries. But undoubtedly, the film's ultimate aesthetic fixation is that of the kaleidoscopic wonders of the mysterious depths of the sea.

The press' simmering antipathy toward Anderson's style finally came to a boil with the release of *The Life Aquatic,* which received mostly middling to negative reviews. (It has a 56 per cent "fresh", or positive, rating on the review aggregation site Rotten Tomatoes.) The "amount of stylisation endangers the film", writes *Film4*, before equivocating by calling it "refreshingly odd and endearingly benign" (Etherington). It also "drowns in a sea of cleverness" (Morgenstern) and exhibits "terminal whimsy" (Ebert). In a scathing review, the *Spectator* calls it "*Moby Dick* written by a pothead A.A. Milne" and suggests that Anderson, like his protagonist, is a filmmaker undergoing a "mid-life crisis" (Steyn) (Anderson was 35-years-old at the time of its release.) The same writer refers to the filmmaker's style as "wussified Wesification" (Steyn), in one of the most blatant examples of backlash against the more feminine qualities of Anderson's characters and mise-en-scène (and a criticism he shares with Coppola; see chapters three and five).

Most critics, however, viewed the film as an enjoyable yet ineffectual piffle along the lines of Associated Press' take: "*The Life Aquatic* is endlessly fascinating to watch but, if you look closer, there's not much there" (Lemire). But there *is* more to *The Life Aquatic* than just quirk for quirk's sake. Like most of Anderson's films, it rewards multiple viewings—the wonderment of the distracting bric-a-brac and whimsy dissipates and attention shifts to how all the miniscule moving parts work together to realise a world view. The film's style and characterisations continue Anderson's mission of reconfiguring the real world in imaginary ways, but here he engages with enduring Romantic conceptions of sublimity and nature like never before.

A self-reflexive ode to the lunacy and creative joy of filmmaking itself, the film is an exercise in paralleling civilisation and nature. While the worlds of nature and culture are rigidly demarcated at times, they have a profound influence on one another. This suggests a grappling with the loss of our "primal natural essence" that characterises so much of Anderson's vision of humanity (and which I expand on in chapter four). Here, Anderson toys with a repudiation of human-centric notions of picturesque and idealised nature, but ultimately embraces those notions. The film offers a nostalgic, sentimental view that undermines sublimity, but it does maintain a strong undercurrent of anxiety.

From the moment we glimpse the first underwater shots of the film—which comprise part of Zissou's nature documentary being screened at a film festival—it is clear that the sea is a wholly imaginary world. Coral that frames the edges of the screen has a vaguely plastic quality, and conjures thoughts of sugary confections with its pastel luminescence. Zissou's mentor, Esteban (Seymour Cassel), swims underwater in front of an obviously phony matte painting (or computer animation made to look like one) as a massive school of small, bright-pink fish whiz by in fast motion (figure 1.8). The scene is cartoonish in its fantasia: full of a peaceful, infectious whimsy, but also a mysterious, Romantic vision of beasts and beauty.

Figure 1.8 A shot of Esteban emphasises the artificiality of the underwater realm as well as the theatricality of its presentation.

At once sublime and beautiful, the sea is the site of Steve's darkest hour and his ultimate, equivocal redemption. In contrast to what Lyotard refers to as the "real sublime sentiment" (Lyotard 45), in *The Life Aquatic* Anderson portrays a

sentimental variation of sublimity. The film suggests, but does not engender, a sublime moment. That is true on both the level of onscreen depiction (for Steve, it is essentially nostalgic) and for the spectator. It serves only to reinforce an ideal of "solace and pleasure"; such a pure fantasy-world depiction cannot elicit the pain and fear necessary for the sublime (Lyotard 45).

The film displays the "good forms" of modernism (81) through the veneration of their ties to personal history and individual authenticity. As well, these forms represent the idea of "the free play, the anarchy, the indeterminacy and disjunctive form that used to be considered characteristic of Postmodernism" (Perloff 185). As such, Anderson weds nostalgia with indeterminacy in a metamodernist marriage. These duelling modes present themselves early on, when the beautiful clashes with the sublime, lending the indeterminate quality of the aesthetic uncanny.

Death rears its head early in the film. Zissou breaks the surface of the water, and breaks the undersea spell, to announce the demise of Esteban, who suffers an attack from the elusive, legendary "jaguar shark". The sea becomes a scene of the terrors of nature, and the beautiful becomes the sublime. But the residue of artifice remains, and the dreamy kitsch of the previous scene renders the death with a sense of tonal uncertainty.

The film-within-the-film ends, and Anderson cuts to wide shots of audience reaction in the upscale opera house where the screening is taking place. There is a dramatic change in the film's colour saturation—Anderson utilized Ektachrome reversal stock for the "documentary" scenes to achieve a highly saturated, dated look (Anderson), but that look also speaks to the vast difference between the world of the film being screened and the film's overall world creation. The new, contrasting location, which underlines the operatic nature of Anderson's film, also points to the appropriation of the natural world for the vicarious thrills of highbrow culture. The world of Zissou's film is such an oddity to the crowd that it might as well be outer space, a point underscored later in the film with the Portuguese-language rendition of David Bowie's "Space Oddity". Not incidentally, the repurposed Bowie covers throughout the film (sung by Seu Jorge) speak to the theme of the familiar being rendered odd and off-kilter.

Nature's unnatural oddities soon reappear. A young fan presents Zissou with a "crayon pony fish", outside of the Opera House. The creature resembles a sea horse but with an aesthetic twist: candy-coloured stripes on its body, a grass-green mane, and a bright pink face (figure 1.9). As the pony fish curls and uncurls its tail in a feat of stop-motion animation, nature again is portrayed as anything *but* naturalistic—the disjointed movements of stop-motion lend an uncanny quality to special effects that, throughout the film, have a handicraft, antiquated, purposefully artificial feel.

Figure 1.9 The fantasy creation of the crayon pony-fish, which resembles a candy-coloured sea horse, is at once beautiful and uncanny.

But can the effects of *The Life Aquatic*'s fantasy mise-en-scène be explained within the larger context of the film's world, or do they describe the aesthetic that Freud delineated in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny"? As John Fletcher writes, Freud considered the aesthetic uncanny to "conflict with the generic world of the text, the postulates of the 'common reality' of secular modernity and its literary regimes of realism and naturalism" (Fletcher 124). Zissou is a man of science, and the film's narrative purports to be one of scientific inquiry. In this way *The Life Aquatic* ostensibly takes place within a secular modernity. But its world is not wholly recognisable in terms of "common reality". It is not reality, per se, but it is also not purely fantasy.

Ultimately it operates as a parody of both secular modernity and generic fantasy, and the effect is of the uncanny. The film postulates that its fantastical creations are exotic yet explicable, when in actuality they are in continual conflict with the naturalism that it purports to portray. The continual presence of fantastical creatures

alongside animals found in typical nature films, like orcas, and even everyday life, such as domestic cats, causes a tension between the mimetic and the constructed qualities of the film's world. Tzvetan Todorov's account of the fantastic (125), which is covered in detail in chapter two, resides in confusion as to whether the narrative the text offers is real or simply imagined by its protagonist or explained as a trick in the story world. Anderson's film makes no attempt to create a questioning of perception in its audience or its characters. The film more closely hews to Todorov's concept of the marvellous, that of the "supernatural accepted" (Todorov 42). But it is still largely uncanny in its obvious artificiality.

The Freudian uncanny testifies to "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, *The Uncanny* 124), rendering the ordinary strangely "alien" (123). Unquestionably, Anderson's creations—the jaguar shark, the wild snow mongoose, the sugar crabs, the rhinestone blue fin—all point to familiar, identifiable species, with a twist of the alien. Anderson himself says his desire was not to "make them unrealistic" but rather "imaginary":

> The answer to "Why stop-motion?" is "Because I love stop-motion". And it's not like I love stop-motion because I think it's this great way to make you think these things are really alive. It's more that I think it's such a magical way to make it seem as though these things are really alive. *And you can see how the illusion is being created* (Seitz 186–187, my emphasis).

That process of revealing the seams of artistic creation seems to counter Burke's idea of terror linked to obscurity or privation. However, according to Lyotard, "The very imperfections, the distortion of taste, even ugliness, have their share in the shock-effect. Art does not imitate nature, it creates a world apart" (249). However, the "shock effect" of Anderson's (and animator Henry Selick's) creations is heavily tempered by their whimsical depiction of beauty, creating a picturesque sense of distorted nature that simultaneously thrills and soothes.

This is underscored in the film's climax, when Zissou and his crew descend to the sublime depths of the darkest ocean in the cartoonish "Yellow Submarine"-esque *Deep Search*, for Steve's own psychological deep search—the confrontation with that of Death itself: the mysterious, heretofore-unseen jaguar shark. They view a

series of exotic, fantastic aquatic life through the portholes as they descend through tree-like stalks of neon green to the ocean floor, which sparkles subtly under the sub's lights as they touch down. As we see the characters framed from without by the sub's front window—in planimetric fashion they are packed in like sardines (almost literally, as they are essentially stuffed into a tin can and appear to be stacked on top of each other). The soundtrack's tinny, toy-like electronic piano adds the sense of a children's fairy tale.

Figure 1.10 The massive jaguar shark is sublimely terrifying but ultimately a specimen of the Burkean beautiful.

The shark itself is first seen as a tiny dot through the sub's observation window. In what is probably Anderson's most jarring use of depth in a shot, it barrels toward the frame, increasingly exponentially in size until it is revealed as truly massive, about three times as large as the sub itself, complete with gaping maw lined with razor-sharp teeth (figure 1.10). But the iridescent beauty of its cat-like spots, shimmering in the vessel's light, and its grace in movement is undeniable. "It's beautiful, Steve", Eleanor says with a sense of pleasurable awe. "I wonder if it remembers me", Steve answers. A look of peaceful resignation envelops him, as the crewmembers, one-by-one, place their hands on his shoulders. It is as if they instinctively recognise that this terrible, sublime force has revealed itself to be one of psychological healing. As Matt Zoller Seitz puts it in the unadorned language of Anderson's films, Steve "stares the beast in the face and realizes it was nothing personal" (Seitz 175). While the pain of death remains, it is tempered, however briefly, by the grand indifference of life.

This aesthetic of picturesque enervation permeates the film. While imperfect, while fantastic, while sometimes even "monstrous", the film's objects are still "good forms"—they fulfil their essential functions despite their sometimes-rickety appearance or the occasional malfunction. Steve's "albino scouts" (two dolphins, actually robotic) are always failing to get the information required for expedition, but their cameras reveal to Steve important narrative information: his crush, journalist Jane (Cate Blanchett), and Ned (Owen Wilson), his possible son, in a romantic clinch. Undoubtedly named after calypso singer Harry Belafonte, in a nod to Cousteau's ship *The Calypso,* Steve's ship, *The Belafonte,* is antiquated and dilapidated (the crew is constantly blowing fuses, the engine is in disrepair) and full of out-dated technology—until they steal the ridiculously advanced tech of his nemesis, Alistair Hennessey. Initially seen as a soulless autocrat by Zissou's team and the film itself, Hennessey (Jeff Goldblum), eventually joins forces with Zissou's crew. Ultimately *The Belafonte* serves its mission, while Hennessey's ship ends up at the bottom of the ocean.

The only malfunction that leads to real tragedy is that of the Zissou helicopter, which crashes into the ocean and kills Ned. But even this fulfils a necessary function, that of leading Steve on a journey to acceptance of the natural order of things and his ultimate lack of control over it (Seitz 188). These antiquated, unwieldy, browbeaten forms aren't the fresh, blank, empty boxes of modernism; they are full of the inescapable history of generations. They form a sort of palimpsest of experience, one that the film readily acknowledges—Steve does not simply cover the name of his submarine (*Jacqueline,* the name of his first wife) with the new moniker, *Deep Search*; he draws a line through it and paints the new name underneath, revealing the proverbial seams of his own historical narrative. Just like the similar tattoo on his arm, which depicts the same Jacqueline/Deep Search override as the submarine, history is indelibly etched in both mise-en-scène and character. Similarly, Steve's beloved *Belafonte* is enlivened with deep cultural and historical connections. A "long-range sub-hunter during the Second World War", it now lives to fight another, more progressively humanist function: serving as the vessel for the enlightened experiment of gaining new, categorical knowledge of the natural world while defining the identities of the characters whom inhabit it. Of

course, that world is only as natural as the fancy of Anderson's mind—which is to say, naturally, uniquely artificial.

The Life Aquatic treats its fantastical beings as matter-of-fact subjects of scientific inquiry. But scientific "fact" is often distorted to the point of absurdity, creating an uneasy balance between the scientifically explicable and the purely fantastic. Zissou is a naturalist, but often his rational explanations for scientific phenomena (such as when he corrects Ned on the source of the illumination of the "electric jellyfish", only to told by Jane that he has completely misidentified the species) are dubious at best. This is not so much an indication of Team Zissou's incompetence (although they are, at times, spectacularly incompetent) so much as it is an effort to underline the fact that the facts matter little—ultimately the film and its audience tacitly acknowledge that in this world of fantasy facts, and science, are meaningless. Even his estranged wife Eleanor, regularly identified as the brains behind the operation, exhibits a tendency to misinformation when she tells Jane that Ned is likely not Steve's son: "Zissou shoots blanks. I think it's because he's spent half his life underwater". This speaks to the separation of the human and natural worlds: we can attempt to quantify it, to collect it, even to bend to it our will, but ultimately we must acknowledge that we do not, and cannot, understand its totality.

Perhaps because of this, Zissou even exhibits a scattershot disdain for the natural world (in its real and imaginary guises), as evidenced most strongly by his drive for revenge against the jaguar shark, but also in everything from his refusal to remember the scientific names of species to his disregard for his supposedly beloved, recently deceased cat. ("Who gives a shit? I think it was a tabby", he replies when Ned inquires about the breed.) Steve wraps a deep-seated anxiety about the inevitability of death in an attitude of faux nonchalance. Anderson's film even creates a sort of "taxonomy of people" (Seitz 159) as much as natural phenomena—his widescreen frames capture the confusion in the human face almost as much as the highly designed tableaux (158). We are, after all, cast-out creatures of nature. According to Slavoj Žižek, "there is no return to the natural balance; to accord with his milieu, the only thing man can do is fully accept this cleft, this fissure, this structural rooting out, and to try as far as possible to patch things up afterwards" (Žižek xxviii). Zissou, like most of the Tenenbaum family, struggles with this acceptance, sharing a

desire to categorise, control, and create order in externalities to compensate for the psychological distress and confusion of a loss of place in the natural order of things.

Like the love dance of the film's peppermint-candy-like sugar crab (which tears a limb off its mate), that acknowledgement of terror and death offers a hint of the sublime amidst the beautiful fantasia. So do the frequent bursts of violence that pepper the film, such as the pirate invasion of the ship and the subsequent rescue of the "Bond Company Stooge" (Bud Cort) on the nature-ravaged Little Ping Island's Hotel Citroën (itself a throwaway reference to the preferred vehicle of the French New Wave, which offered its own frequent moments of jarring violence). Steve, and the viewer, experiences a feeling of sublime transcendence during his encounter with the jaguar shark. But in its very nostalgia for "the transcendence that underlay the notion of sublimity" (Larrissy 7), it is not strictly a sublime moment.

The sublime "hinges on the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal" to the presentation of the unpresentable (Lyotard 45). The jaguar shark fully reveals itself, and, ironically it is a force for peace and pleasure, a beautiful object. Still, it *is* a man-eater, and not a harmless tabby cat. Sublime emotion is tamed, and pain is reduced to an underlying kernel of anxiety. But that anxiety never fully dissipates—it is related to the postmodern indeterminacy that Steve (like Margot, Richie and Chas) continually rejects through an all-encompassing need to control his own identity and narrative through the control of his environment, the grand director of own personal mise-en-scène. His acceptance of a lack of control does not negate the sting.

As in *The Royal Tenenbaums,* Anderson's method of constructing his mise-en-scène is an attempt to find order in disorder and continuity in chaos, or at least to *depict* such an attempt. But the attempt is continually undermined. This is evident, as well, in the way he engages with "camp" as a form of questioning rationality and reason.

The Camp Cathedral: Eclecticism in Anderson's Mise-en-Scène

In its allusions to Gothic irregularity, disorder, and antiquarian pastiche (Fletcher 114–118) the film evinces a sort of "proto-sublime" (114). The Gothic predilections

of *The Royal Tenenbaums* might seem to run counter to the Enlightenment narrative Anderson sets up early on in the form of the Tenenbaum children's early experiments in the "progressive operations of critical reason" (Docherty 5) by way of their natural genius. According to John Fletcher, Gothic revival pastiche in the Romantic era was a response to "whatever is felt to have been lost in the advance of civilization and the Enlightenment" (115) through a "process of cultural mourning" and "nostalgia" (114). This elegiac nostalgia, particularly for objects of early childhood, is rampant throughout *Tenenbaums*, but also crops up in *The Life Aquatic*—consider Ned's treasured Zissou Society insignia ring or the flashback to his proud "discovery" of a new species, which, at ten years old, he dubs the "Zissou fly".

None of Anderson's work quite embraces the idea of the Gothic in the way that *Tenenbaums* does, however. The Dark or Gothic House, with its "fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space" (Fletcher 119), is probably the Gothic revival's most enduring architectural creation. But its original incarnation was Horace Walpole's much less sinister Strawberry Hill (118), a "neat modern" eighteenth-century building that the author, who is regarded as the first Gothic revival novelist, purchased in 1747 and preceded to embellish with "Gothic motifs such as arched doors and window, niches, fan-vaulting, tracery and finials" (118). But Walpole's project was by no means an exercise in period authenticity—he "made no attempt to reproduce medieval domestic space", instead going so far as model the interior's fireplaces on the derided tombs of Westminster Abbey, with their "sharp jetties, narrow Lights, lame Statues, lace, and other cutwork and crinkle-crankle" (118). The Gothic pastiche of Strawberry Hill is a highly Romantic form of reimagining history through personal proclivities.

The "imaginary mise-en-scène" (Fletcher 118) of Walpole's vision would likely appeal to Anderson, with his similar obsession with material "crinkle-crankle". Anderson is less concerned with the "darkness" of the Gothic vision than he is with the play of darkness and light. His knack for this synthesis is reminiscent of another Gothic architectural idea, embodied by that of the Gothic cathedral. Inspired by John Ruskin's 1853 *The Stones of Venice,* this architectural notion posits a more unified, even picturesque, idea of the Gothic, one which offers a "Utopian critique" where

"art is the expression of man's pleasure in his labour" and "beauty is once again the natural and necessary accompaniment of productive labour" (121). Anderson's mise-en-scène is as much if not more preoccupied by beauty as it is the Gothic sense of decay, mournful loss and doomed "repetition and return" (121). It is also enamoured with the renewed hope of endless possibility and the beauty of human creation, that "re-joins modernity and even Modernism" in this reconfigured idea of the Gothic (121).

In her 1964 essay "Notes on Camp", Susan Sontag traces the origins of camp back to the Romantic Gothic revival, with its "novels, Chinosieries, caricature, artificial ruins" (Sontag 280), the latter of which is a hallmark of the picturesque. Sontag places Walpole squarely in this "great period of Camp" (280). Many of the tenets of camp fall squarely within the Anderson milieu: an "effacement" or contradiction of nature, sentimentality, a sense of the esoteric, an "extraordinary feeling for artifice, for surface, for symmetry", exaggeration, the idea of "life as theatre", and an obsession with "decorative art, emphasizing texture" (278). But there is a quintessential component of camp missing from the director's oeuvre: disaffection.

Anderson creates worlds whose characters seek to turn their own history into camp, who turn *themselves* into objects of camp—"a person being one, very intense thing" (286)—but the filmic attitude to them, despite comic jabs at their predicaments, remains straight-faced and sympathetic. His characters describe their own archetypes (troubled artist, steadfast businessman, worldly raconteur) through sheer force of will, resisting development and change regardless of the stark realities of their current circumstances. They are trapped, almost literally, within a self-made camp. (Richie even likes to pretend he is "camping" in a tent in the Tenenbaum ballroom.) The artifice of their worlds simultaneously idealises their world-view through their own deep, personal emotion and repudiates their folly. They usually change or "grow" in some way, but they never fully escape their theatrical prisons. Self-acknowledgement is, in general, as far as it goes.

"Camp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world", states Sontag; "it incarnates a victory of 'style' over 'content,' 'aesthetics' over 'morality,' of irony over tragedy," (Sontag 287). But this does not describe the work of Anderson

adequately. His films inhabit largely moral universes, and his characters, even if they feign indifference, care deeply. If there is "never, never tragedy" (287) in camp, there is always underlying tragedy in Anderson's films. The tragedy itself, on one level, is based in the insistence on a purely aesthetic, amoral interface with the world. Like a good Romantic, Anderson wants us to care, to *feel*. According to Sontag, "One is drawn to Camp when one realizes that 'sincerity' is not enough" (288). Anderson clearly trades in irony even while being prepossessed by sincerity. His irony is couched in the idea that pure expressions of sincerity have been rendered obsolete; he simultaneously mourns this while luxuriously surrendering to its loss. The dialogue in his films complements these ideas. Simultaneously theatrical and authentic, it imbues straightforward speech with deadpan detachment to deaden its portrayal of sincerity.

Despite its primary use of everyday language, Anderson's dialogue often rings artificial. With its deadpan tone and emphasis on peculiar cadence (at once laconic and immediate), it offers a heightened feeling of realism, an artificial sense of the real that draws attention to its constructed nature (Jaeckle 4). In his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth proposed the use of language that hews closely to that of real life, but differentiates itself in its use of metre, offering heightened effects that "imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling, which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions" (Wordsworth 129). In Anderson's films, a Wordsworthian "low and rustic" (115) realism combined with an almost imperceptible sense of the uncanny creates a picturesque quality in dialogue not unlike that created in mise-en-scène.

Likewise, the Wordsworthian tempering of the passions with an "overbalance of pleasure" (127) is a hallmark of Andersonian verbal style. Geoff Ward, with emphasis on Wordsworth's *Prelude*, points to the relationship between panic and syntax and the power of syntax to "suture over trauma" (Ward 90). This is achieved through the prolonged use of style and rhetoric, which creates a distancing effect between experience and pain: "as the brilliance of life fades, there arises the urge to hold on to it, to map it, to seize it and fill all its space, securing the comfort that on-going syntax provides against silence" (93). "Suturing over trauma" brings to mind

Richie's literal sutures on his slashed wrists, Frankenstein-like stiches revealed shortly before Margot declares, "I think we'll just have to be secretly in love with each other and leave it at that". While the pain and trauma of the scene is palpable, it is undercut with this semi-absurdist statement, one that would likely never be articulated with such a knowing matter-of-factness in reality.

Comically blunt, almost perfunctory dialogue is a key way for Anderson to undercut pain and anxiety in scenes. Characters routinely refuse to deal in subtext, instead preferring to articulate, often in a confrontational manner, what would normally remain unspoken truths, as when Steve Zissou refers to Alistair Hennessey as his "nemesis" right in front of him, Royal continually introduces Margot as his "adopted daughter", and Eli Cash confesses he "always wanted to be a Tenenbaum". These examples aren't symptomatic of Anderson's inability to deal with subtext, but that of his characters' inability to do so. This language is not designed to provoke negative reactions or hurt feelings from others, but rather to rob the burdensome, distressing "unsaid" of its sublime power. According to Paul Hamilton, the Romantic idea of sublimity "recasts failures of understanding as the successful symbolic expression of something greater than understanding" (Hamilton 13) while postmodernism interprets these failures as a result of the "indeterminacy of meaning" (13). For Anderson's characters, the only way to counteract this indeterminacy is to remove, or at least address, the possibility of miscommunication.

The suturing aspect of language is also utilised with a more positive tone and creates continuities between films. In *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Chas tells his soon-to-be stepfather Henry that he is also a widower, and Henry responds, with a hand placed gently on Chas's shoulder, "I know, Chas". In *The Life Aquatic* an almost identical scene occurs when Steve tells Ned that "his best friend just got killed, Esteban". "Yeah, I know", Ned replies with sympathy. Of course, the death of Esteban is the impetus for the entire narrative of revenge in the film, so Steve must know Ned knows, at least on some level. It is the act of the statement, of the saying it aloud, that diffuses the anxiety of the knowledge. Pain must be expressed verbally, or at least written down. Again, the sublime becomes picturesque when subtext is negated.

For Burke, a clear expression (the visual) "describes a thing as it is", while a *strong* expression (language) "describes it as its felt" (278). Words elucidate feeling and evoke passions that mimetic images aren't capable of, and "therefore, a clear idea is another name for a little idea" (89). Instead of using words to "evoke passions", Anderson uses them to clarify—but the clarification does not make them "little ideas" so much as diffuse the sublimity of strong expression.

Conclusion

According to Michael Chabon, Anderson's depictions of emotional pain through distance offer a greater perception of the idea of grief itself:

> Grief, at full scale, is too big for us to take it in; it literally cannot be comprehended. Anderson […] understands that distance can increase our understanding of grief, allowing us to see it whole. But distance does not—ought not—necessarily imply a withdrawal (Chabon 22).

In this context, grief represents a sublime idea, one that is unpresentable—too big to be taken in "whole". Anderson takes the sublimity of grief and robs it of its sublime power through aesthetic means. However, as Chabon suggests, that does not mean his films dismiss or deny it wholesale. The primary aesthetic function of Anderson's film worlds is always to create palpable tension between polarities, be they pleasure and pain, the present and the past, or even life and death. Within the painful picturesque and the sentimental sublime, he finds his aesthetic niche.

Anderson's ironic distance and reliance on fantasy partially repudiates the sincere nostalgia for a time of the "good forms" and rational progress of the modernist ideal. But it also mourns the loss of sincerity, creating works steeped in beauty whose cracks yield glimpses of the sublime. Like other contemporary filmmakers influenced by the tenets of Romanticism, Anderson concedes that the world and its remembered past are just personal constructs, as artificial as movie sets and as subjective and ego-driven as the Romantic artist himself.

In *The Royal Tenenbaums,* he does this through expressions of beauty undercut by sublimity, creating a palpable anxiety and a sense of permanent indeterminacy, which I argue results in a painful sense of picturesque enervation. Similarly, in *The*

Life Aquatic, he turns sublime landscapes into uncannily beautiful fantasias, defanging the indeterminacy of the postmodern sublime and rendering it personally meaningful, the site of psychological growth through acceptance of that indeterminacy. Anderson's films are sentimental, yes, but that sentiment is in service of larger thematic aims: the questioning of reason, and the searching for purpose in a world without it.

Unlike Anderson, writer-director Charlie Kaufman has rarely been accused of bald sentimentality. In his 2008 film, *Synecdoche, New York*, he portrays an imaginative, subjective point of view that leans more toward horror than picturesque unity. However, as I argue in chapter two, the film offers an optimistic counterpoint to its depiction of a writer suffering from the limits of his own creative capability and relation to the external world. That counterpoint rests in the aesthetics of the film itself, which continually push back against its protagonist's self-destructive solipsism.

II

"An Endless Succession of Mirrors": Irony, Ambiguity, and the Crisis of Authenticity in *Synecdoche, New York*

"There's no such thing as certainty, that's plain /
As any of mortality's conditions"
–Lord Byron, *Don Juan* (1819–1824)

In this chapter I describe how, through various stylistic and narrative devices, the ambiguously defined world creation of Charlie Kaufman's 2008 film *Synecdoche, New York* engages both its protagonist and its audience in a state of emotional agitation and confusion. Its otherworldly, heightened, and highly theatrical realm does not abide by realistic constructs of time and space, and as a result, Kaufman demonstrates a Romantic questioning of the rationality and inevitability of the progressive ideals of Enlightenment and modernism through a sustained use of Romantic irony.

Kaufman is a Romantic ironist in that he plainly acknowledges that the overcoming of subjectivity is impossible, while simultaneously creating "new forms and myths" (Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* 5) to engage with these forms and myths on a sceptical level. His fantastical worlds are always in the process of being crushed under their own imaginative weight, in the sense that they continually display a tendency to reveal their own mythical status. They are consistently metatextual and reflexive, and this produces a distancing effect to their narratives. But at the same time, they engage the spectator on a deeply emotional level. This is due in part to a strong reliance on subjectivity—in *Synecdoche, New York,* the spectator experiences much of the action through the subjectivity of its protagonist, Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman). But the film also creates an ambiguous tension between Caden's subjectivity and the subjective viewpoints of others, even including those pretending to "be" him, in order to recognise the gulf between subjectivities as it creates what Joel Evans refers to as a "network of affects" (Evans 335).

Kaufman engages in a metatexual relation to his protagonist by utilising Romantic irony as originally defined by Friedrich Schlegel. Caden is in many ways a semi-satirical caricature of the Romantic "Hero of Sensibility", defined by his extreme sensitivity, subjectivity, sense of guilt and solitude and embrace of personal suffering (Thorslev 35). He lacks the capability of the optimistic Romantic ironist: the ability to embrace the chaos of existence and utilise it in his artistic creations. Kaufman systematically undermines Caden's ability to control his external surroundings and relationships through various aesthetic devices. Essentially, the film operates on a level where its aesthetic aims undermine its character's desires through the use of fantastical elements.

Caden seeks the control and comfort of absolutes and thus becomes removed from participating meaningfully in his own life. While he fears chaos and tries to counteract it, Kaufman accepts it, and paints his protagonist as tragic for his inability to change and adapt. While ultimately an example of Romantic pessimism similar to Byron's "metaphysical" dramas *Manfred* and *Cain* (Mellor 12), the film works on the level of Schlegelian Romantic irony due to Kaufman's treatment of his own material. The film itself becomes an ironic commentary on its protagonist's inability to embrace irony.

Synecdoche, New York is a distillation of the thematic preoccupations that Kaufman previously addressed as the screenwriter of *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Human Nature* (2001), *Adaptation* (2002), *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002), and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), as well as his directorial follow-up, *Anomalisa* (2015). These include osmosis between the external and mental worlds and between the mental worlds of individuals (LaRocca 6), repetition and doubling and confused subjectivities (9), the creation of emotionally immersive yet obviously fictitious heightened "realities" (6) and an examination of individual isolation amidst the indifference of a larger humanity (8). In *Synecdoche, New York,* Kaufman engages his audience emotionally through empathetic subjectivity, casting a spell similar to that experienced by his protagonist, who suffers the slippery effects of time and the questioning of his very relation to the larger world. Kaufman also engages the spectator in questioning the very idea of what is "real" in the first place**.**

Of all the filmmakers I discuss, Kaufman's work by far is most characterised by the idea of such extreme subjectivity, bordering on solipsism. He draws on traditions of philosophical German idealism and authors as diverse as ETA Hoffmann, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Mary Shelley, and Lord Byron; the magical realism of later authors such as Jorge Luis Borges; and the post-war European cinema of what David Martin-Jones refers to as the "crisis of modernity" (46). In *Synecdoche, New York*, Kaufman questions the nature of objective reality primarily through his use of the fantastic "themes of the self" as defined by Tzvetan Todorov (109) and through the problematising of narrative space via the mise en abyme, which engenders an experience of the mathematical sublime. Kaufman creates a strong sense of ambiguity in whether what we are seeing on screen is "real"—a reflection of an objective, external reality—or just the projection of a diseased mind. The filmmaker specifically works against concepts of mimetic realism in order to access *emotional* realism while exploring ideas of subjectivity, solipsism, and idealism through a supposed reflection of the point of view of his protagonist. In the process, he engages in a highly Romantic form of irony in his questioning of absolutes and embrace of the chaos of becoming.

Romantic Irony: From Kant and Schlegel to Byron and Beyond

Romantic irony has its roots in early German idealism and Immanuel Kant's notion of transcendental idealism (Mellor 25). Kant's "modest" version of idealism asserts that objects are transcendentally ideal because they are perceived by the mind—we can only judge objects in the world by our own individual mental processes (McQuillan). However, for Kant this did not mean that those objects do not exist outside our perception, but that we have no way of judging them outside of being "objects for us" (McQuillan). Nevertheless, these objects are still a part of the world of sensation, the phenomenal, which we intuit. Kant's "agnostic" form of idealism posits that we can never really truly know reality outside of our perception of it and thus whether our perception is "correct" (Guyer and Horstmann 5.2).

This split between noumenon (the world independent of the mind) and phenomenon (the world as it is experienced by the mind) is, according to Kant, unable to be traversed (Mellor 25). Human experience, and thus human knowledge, is finite as a

result (25). When the mind attempts (and fails) to traverse this gap between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, it enters the mode of pure reason—developing concepts such as infinity and totality, sublime ideas inaccessible to direct human experience (26). This, in turn, can lead to despair and "psychic atrophy" out of the inability to experience such concepts first-hand; "imprisoned in its own finitude" (26), the human mind is left with a longing that can never be fulfilled.

Later German idealists Johann Gottlieb Fichte (b.1762–d.1814) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (b.1775–d.1854) make more radical assertions on subjectivity and self-consciousness. According to Fichte, "the *I* posits itself" (Breazeale 3), that is, human consciousness creates itself and the universe it experiences (Mellor 27). In this version of idealism, the Kantian "thing in itself", an object independent of subjective consciousness, does not exist (McQuillan). Schelling pushes Fichte's doctrine of idealism into solipsism when he asserts that the mind itself (or the "absolute I") creates the universe with its own consciousness (Mellor 28). The problem for the early Romantics, many of whom were sceptical of such solipsistic notions (McQuillan) and ascribed to Kant's idea of noumenon, was how to bridge the gap between the world of sensation and experience and the world as it really "is" (Mellor 27).

As its earliest and greatest proponent, German Romantic Friedrich Schlegel (b.1772–d.1829), defines it, Romantic irony embraces the idea that noumenon is fundamentally based on the principle of chaos (Mellor 27). For Schlegel, the idea of noumenon as *becoming*, rather than being, sets up a profound relation of things in relation to other things—everything is simultaneously itself and in the process of becoming not itself (or "p = not-p in the act of becoming") (27). This constant act of becoming represents a "way into infinity", analogous to "pure energy" (27) in an unending process of change.

Far from the simple rhetorical device it once was, irony in the Romantic era became its own philosophy or "general world view" (Behler 48, 49). Rather than clinging to any concept of an ordered, rational universe subject to human control, Romantic irony posits one of "incomprehensible" tumult (Schlegel 260). Instead of being a cause for despair, however, Schlegel defines this ever-changing state as one of

Fülle, or fertile abundance, an ecstatic infinite becoming rich with creative possibility (Mellor 7). But this concept of *Fülle* is double-edged; it creates an eternal, unsatisfied sense of longing for an increased participation in it (8). Since the human mind cannot actually comprehend such infinite chaos, the experience of the reality of *Fülle* can never be complete, becoming only an approximation of reality that ultimately must be rejected (Mellor 8).

As a remedy against this longing, we attempt to impose systems of order (being) onto this disorder (becoming), even though an opposing desire for "chaos and freedom" also exists (8). This creates an unrelenting tension, or dialectic, that never results in synthesis (6). As such, a "sceptical awareness" of our own mental limitations, combined with a longing to overcome them, defines the process of Romantic irony (10). According to Anne Mellor, for Schlegel such scepticism, or "critical idealism" (15), was necessary in order to "detach imagination from an excessive commitment to its own finite creations" (10). Nevertheless, commitment and enthusiasm were also key to establishing this dialectic:

> Irony can free the imagination to discover or create ever-new relationships, to participate once again in the fertile chaos of life. For if a person were ever to believe that his reason had fully comprehended this chaos, that conviction would in itself destroy his capacity to participate in the mystery and primeval power of life (10).

Operating under the idea that the universe is comprehensible to individual consciousness, or the "illusion" of perfectibility (10), robs the subject from being able to play her own role properly and fully. Such philosophical irony also provides a "check" to the imagination, curtailing "excessive commitment to the fictions of one's own mind" in order to be able to participate in life's continual becoming (11). In his *Lyceum (Critical) Fragment*s, Schlegel refers to irony as a form of "self-limitation" characterised by "self-creation and self-destruction" (Schlegel 147). Irony plays with the limitations of individual subjectivity while simultaneously "open[ing] up the possibility of the infinity of other perspectives", those of potentially endless other subjectivities (Speight 3.6).

According to Schlegel, applying such principles to artistic work results in a genuine Romantic poetry, one "free of all real and ideal self-interest" that reflects back on itself in an "endless succession of mirrors", magnifying its original principles without ever being fully "perfected" (Schlegel 175). Schlegel applied this philosophy to his own creative work. He called his unfinished novel *Lucinde* "shaped, artistic chaos […] chaotic and yet systematic" (Speight 3.2). Such a "playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden" (Schlegel 156) irony comes closest to offering human consciousness the "perception of the infinite chaos of reality" (Mellor 13). It hinges on the "value of falsity" (13), recognising the human inability to discern reality within our limited subjectivity while simultaneously embracing the potential inherent in change.

Romantic irony leads to fictional world creation that both recognises its falsehood yet simultaneously presents itself as the sincere reflection of a subjective point of view (Mellor 14). The artist enthusiastically commits himself to his creation while simultaneously showing its "limitations" as a subjective creation of a "finite human being" (14). This kind of ironic stance can be achieved through devices such as symbolism and allegory (11) and alternative outcomes to the same events, and metatextual elements such as parabasis (Speight 3.6), paradox (Schlegel 149), and self-parody (156). Schlegel refers to such processes as *Selbstbeschränkung,* a "hovering" between creating and undoing creation wherein the artist "simultaneously projects his ego or selfhood as a divine creator and also mocks, criticizes, or rejects his created fictions as limited and false" (Mellor 14). But while the fiction is ultimately "false", it is not inauthentic. This dialectic of earnestness and scepticism reveals its deceit (Thorlby 131) and creates an "ambivalent awareness" (132) of the constant navigation of becoming. Remaining "true to the actual contradictions of life" (Mellor 15), the Romantic ironist is, in fact, the truly authentic artist.

Synecdoche, New York demonstrates these tensions through many such ironic aesthetic devices, creating an impossible world that attempts to reveal unlimited possibilities: infinite space through the creation of mise en abyme, forking timelines, and endlessly embodied subjectivities. Mellor sees "true" Romantic irony as a function of the optimistic and comic—her ultimate example is Byron's *Don Juan*—

and points to the idea of "play" as crucial in its creation (24). *Synecdoche*, however, creates an essentially tragic and pessimistic portrait of a subjectivity undermined by its inability to engage with the world on a philosophically ironic level. But the film itself (and Kaufman as writer-director) *affirms* Romantic irony as its ultimate creative position. Its tragedy lies in the fact that its protagonist refuses to engage with it. The film subjects Caden to the chaotic systems of becoming, which Caden attempts to conform to an ordered, rational system where he dictates the terms. As such, he becomes an inauthentic artist and person. By refusing to engage ironically with such a radical becoming, he actually ceases to *be*—he becomes the walking dead, a "ghost who haunts his own life" (Deming 201), a projection of his own memory.

While Mellor sees positivity and optimism in Romantic irony (199), it is important to note that such irony can take different forms. Ernst Behler contests that theories of irony continued to evolve in the Romantic era, constituting a turn from "optimism and joyous freedom toward sadness, melancholy and despair" (45). This darker ironic sense springs from an overbearing adherence toward the "infinite longing" that Schlegel considers one half of the Romantic ironic dialectic (45). The "German misery" of tragic irony (46), epitomized by Goethe's *Faust*, spread to other nations as well, including France and Britain, and had an indelible influence on Byron (Thorslev 166). According to Behler, such irony is caused by a rift between protagonist and audience expectations—"the protagonist, misjudging reality, makes in his hybris [*sic*] self-assured statements which affect the discerning audience ironically" (Behler 46). Kaufman's film includes such a pivotal moment: when Caden announces to his cast and crew that the play he intends to stage will provide "nothing less than the brutal truth".

Synecdoche, New York continues a tradition of ironic pessimism present in Goethe's *Faust* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Manfred,* and *Cain* (Thorslev 87). Peter Thorslev details how the Romantic "Hero of Sensibility" emerged as a response to the "dead certainties" of Enlightenment tropes (85). (Such a hero is sometimes known as the Byronic hero, although Byron was strongly influenced by Goethe) (166). The Hero of Sensibility is not defined by action, but by a capacity for deep feeling and the "tender emotions—gentle and

tearful love, nostalgia, and a pervasive melancholy" (35). The Hero of Sensibility combines the death-obsessed "Gloomy Egoist" (46) with the sensitive "Man of Feeling", a well-educated man who is "not necessarily handsome, and is never robust; usually he is pale and inclined to fevers, especially 'brain fevers' brought about by fits of melancholy" (39). The Man of Feeling, it seems, feels so much it literally affects his physical health.

He is solitary and sometimes cowardly, prone to "benevolent acts" that are usually "sporadic and ineffectual" (Thorslev 39). He is usually an artist, one possessed by a sorrow of "cosmic significance" (42). *Weltschmerz* is his particular "Romantic disease", the conflict between the desire for order and the need to feel like a working part of a "living organic universe" and the belief in individual personality and passion over and above the greater workings of that universe (89). It is a suffering that could be attributed to most any Romantic artist—such a state characterises Romantic thought—but for the Hero of Sensibility, the sceptical self tends to reign supreme, with the "detached, insulated, and passionately individual" taking precedence over sublime mysticism (89). Throughout Kaufman's film, Caden remains a tragic figure in this mode. He is a Man of Feeling who becomes disconnected from his own emotions due to his inability to affectively engage in his life as he is living it.

Now that I have established the parameters of Romantic irony and its attendant "hero" in works of fiction, I will detail the ways in which Kaufman's film exemplifies these ideas. Impossible world creation and the defiance of traditional mimetic filmic realism is key to the film's situating Caden within an ironic becoming that he refuses to engage, to his great detriment.

Embracing *Fülle* and Undermining Realism in *Synecdoche, New York*

While lay audiences often consider filmic ideas of realism as unquestionable and "natural", they are actually built on a strictly codified language based upon presiding cultural norms. This world logic, or verisimilitude, is not based on reality per se, but on the idea of reality entered into as a social contract between filmmaker and audience (Branigan 28). In the case of filmic realism, this usually means a classical

definition of continuity, which involves a strict coherence to action-led narratives, ones driven by characters identifying clear goals and reacting to them (23). This results "in a temporary equilibrium allowing the next phase of action to commence" (23). What is actually a series of disjointed, non-contiguous shots and often highly stylised mise-en-scène featuring purpose-built artificial lighting and constructed sets reads as "reality" to an audience, who unconsciously fill in narrative gaps and tacitly agree to enter into the fictional world without acknowledging it as such, creating a "true feeling" that is "not necessarily the truth" (Branigan 206). It is, however, a coherent world, one that the spectator can easily follow and conform to the laws of time and space.

David Bordwell refers to the use of "fabula", the narrative mentally constructed by the audience, and the "syuzhet", the arrangement of the fabula, or, essentially, what the film is telling us (Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* 100). An "overloaded" syuzhet might lead to boredom on behalf of the audience, providing the viewer too few gaps to fill in, thus eliminating participatory engagement (54). A "rarefied" syuzhet risks doing the opposite, leading to a sense of confusion and dislocation, alienating the viewer and breaking the fictional spell of reality (54). This can create a lack of "emotional realism", resulting in an inability of audiences to empathically connect to the narrative through character, and creating a sense of disbelief in the film world. The spectator is removed from the "Secondary World" of the fiction and finds herself once again in our "Primary World" reality (Wolf 24). The immersive nature of the constructed film world is lost, however momentarily.

Sometimes, however, a filmmaker will seek to cast a fictional spell whose very existence relies upon confusion and disbelief—in fact, its central theme rests upon it. In Mark Wolf's view, this might make it a "failure" (24). Although he readily admits that "curiosity must be aroused" by a work of fiction, according to Wolf, the goal of fictional world creation should be a sense of *completeness,* which gives the impression that all questions could, in theory, be answered, even though they are not (61). Certainly, this sense of precision and desire for explanation runs counter to the idea of sublimity. Ambiguity in world creation does not necessarily represent a failure of art, particularly when an artist does not take realism as an end goal and instead seeks to question the very concept of what constitutes reality.

Thomas Pavel has written of the "worrisome" instances of fictional worlds being capable of "contradictory objects" that appear incompatible with our own (such as the ability to draw a geometrically impossible square circle), but concedes that these impossible phenomena do not necessarily entail "evidence against the notion of *world*" (Pavel 50, his emphasis). He points to the "impossible entities" of our own world, including "individual psyches, desires, dreams, and symbols" (50). Pavel's conception of "possible-world theory" contains a universe of competing alternatives to our own "actual world" (64). In fiction, however, there are already a multiplicity of "worlds 'actual'-in-the-system", not just one (54). While Pavel acknowledges the power and "noble" quality of traditional modes of realism, he also acknowledges the potential found in a "mythical discourse" that uncovers the ruse of completeness and consistency (77, 78).

He distinguishes between those texts whose goal is cohesive world creation and those that construct fictional worlds in order to "lay bare" the very concept of their fiction "for the sake of adventure and investigation" (84–85). Pointing to ETA Hoffmann, Nerval, Balzac, and their modernist progeny Borges and Franz Kafka, Pavel accounts for the valid questioning of mimetic principles and the introduction of "puzzling" worlds that lead to "inadequate hypotheses" and encourage hesitation, leading the audience to create a "perplexed fictional ego, unsure of its ability to make sense of the events it witnesses" (93). Fictional worlds need not be warm, soothing, immersive, and unquestioning. I argue that "emotional realism" can be achieved through the identification with character confusion as much as it can be in the creation of seamless, mimetic narratives and explicit character motivation. In *Synecdoche*, *New York,* the spectator arrives at a closer picture of emotional realism through its use of expressive, surreal, and fantastic techniques than could ever be achieved through the illusory practices of filmic realism.

Ambiguity is a key function of narratives that seek to uncover those "deep fractures" (Pavel 73) hidden in mimetic realism, creating spaces that exist on "alien logic", evoking both the dream world and a myth-puncturing realism simultaneously (93). Hans Braedlin suggests that ambiguity is grounded in its own particular aesthetics (Braedlin 3–4). Robert Scholes goes so far as to contend that film, already sufficiently mimetic as an art form, does not need to hold "realism or verisimilitude

as an evaluative standard", unlike literature, and instead "must achieve some level of reflection, or conceptualization, in order to reach its optimum condition as narrative" (Scholes 5). In other words, a mimetically reproductive art form such as film should go beyond its capacity to mimic reality in order to create a reflexive relationship to its own sense of realism.

Perhaps fittingly, the sense of ambiguity created in *Synecdoche, New York* resulted in a split critical response. It was named one of the most "polarizing" films since 2000 in a 2016 poll (Rosenbloom). *The LA Times* calls it "wildly ambitious [...] sprawling, awe-inspiring, heartbreaking, frustrating, hard-to-follow and achingly, achingly sad" (Chocano). *The New York Times* writes that it is "a romance of such delicate feeling that it's still a shock that it carries a studio brand" (Dargis). In 2009, Roger Ebert named it the best film of the decade, and wrote, "It will open to confused audiences and live indefinitely". It is hard to say how confused audiences were, because few showed up to screenings. The film was a massive commercial failure, recouping a fraction of its estimated US $21 million budget.

Many critics refused to grace it with the public's indifference. *The New Yorker* refers to it as "an amazing conceit" that "grows increasingly hard to grasp as a practical enterprise, and even harder to believe in" (Lane). *Entertainment Weekly* ironically echoes the predicament of the film's protagonist in its negative review: "The compulsion to stand outside of one's life and observe it to this degree isn't the mechanism of art—it's the structure of psychosis" (Gleiberman). None-too-subtle *Observer* critic Rex Reed pronounces that it could be "the worst movie ever" (Reed). Academic responses to the film are more subdued, but the general consensus is that it is "not an 'enjoyable' film" (Hill 219). Rebecca Davers calls it "confusing and frustrating" (25). "It feels unhealthy, plunging us into its magnified solipsism, constricted in Kaufman's fidelity to crafting a pathologically subjective film experience", Derek Hill writes in his largely positive appraisal (219). The main point of contention over the film's value seems to lie in whether immersion in its world constitutes a critical engagement with such "pathology" or an affirmation of it.

Unlike Daniel Shaw, I would argue the former. "Characters such as Cotard embody the deer-caught-in-the-headlights powerlessness that is symptomatic of what

Nietzsche called passive nihilism", writes Shaw dismissively; "Worst of all, the film is not very funny" (265). Most scholarly assessments are much more positive, however. Hill writes about *Synecdoche* in relation to authenticity and realism, and praises the film for its Felliniesque ability to use "fantastical tropes […] as a means for burrowing deeper beneath the surface of things" (218). David L. Smith discusses the film in relation to longing for unity of identity (or "wholeness") and autobiography (242). He also contends that language creates our "sense of separation" from the world and details how Kaufman highlights this idea (243). Richard Deming addresses scepticism and subjectivity in the film, and suggests that the portrayed fluidity of subjectivity counteracts the desire to coherently "know oneself" (196), in a clear echo of Romantic irony. Finally, Joel Evans writes about the film in relation to Gilles Deleuze's time-image and the concept of infinite regress, and how they relate to the signification of global space within late modernity.

I will address most of the above points, but I begin with Hill's notion of fantastical worlds uncovering hidden (emotional, metaphysical) realities. I primarily use Tzvetan Todorov's theories of the fantastic in my analysis, as I consider them the most advantageous to gain an understanding of how Kaufman's film addresses itself as a constructed space and as a ground for metaphysical questioning.

Synecdoche, New York and Fantastic World Creation

A hallucinatory journey through the creative process and an unnerving exploration of the solipsistic collapse between matter and mind, *Synecdoche, New York* also serves as a sympathetic parody of the Romantic trope of the all-consumed, passionate artist-genius. The film tells the fantastical, metaphysical tale of Caden Cotard, whom we first meet wandering somnambulistically in the morass of middle age, trapped in a middling career as a director of suburban American regional theatre. After mounting a gargantuan theatrical production meant to physically encompass the entire city of New York—and the entire story of his life in minute detail—Caden is eventually reduced to a veritable husk as doppelgangers of himself and his loved ones run amok while play-acting scenes from his life. The decades pass with seemingly blistering speed as his play is continually rehearsed. Little by

little, he loses everything and everyone he cares about, either as a result of the ticking clock of time or his own inability to make meaningful connections. Eventually he is doomed to wander the streets of an artificial post-apocalyptic landscape of his own creation, which is all that is left of reality as he knows it.

Kaufman's film is decidedly not one built to generate universal commercial appeal or critical consensus, so its reception is not entirely surprising. It is a difficult film that engages with its philosophical and fantastic elements directly; this is not a work of fiction that can be passively consumed in any kind of coherent, sensical way, and in this sense it defies the illusionistic principles of typical filmic realism. In interviews, Kaufman shows a disdain for filmic realism by acknowledging it as an artificial construction in itself: "The whole idea of literal realism—it's all a contrivance and a convention that we accept. So why not explore the larger realm?" (Guillén). But far from being simply an intellectual exercise, his world creation is also purposefully immersive; its reflexive qualities do not detract from its emotional resonance. Kaufman's primary concern regarding realism is emotional, not physical: "I'm looking for the emotional thing as opposed to the logical thing", he says (Rose). The filmmaker refuses to see the two impulses as contradictory:

> I really like artifice, and I really like reminding people they're watching a movie. And I really like the idea of having people question the veracity of what they're watching. So by mixing things that are possibly real with things that are clearly not real or are questionable […] I don't see it as a paradox. I've always liked fake worlds and I like sets and I like illusion. But I don't like being lied to. I think movies lie a lot. And maybe *I'm trying not to lie by saying that I am lying* (Guillén**,** my emphasis).

By being "lied to" it is possible Kaufman means the way classical film production plasters over Pavel's "deep fractures" in an attempt to deny the very nature of its falsehood. Kaufman is echoing the Romantic principle of authenticity—he eschews an interest in mimetic realism in favour of an *inner* authenticity, and a sincerity of purpose (Milnes and Sinanan 4). His use of irony, in this sense, relates to personal authenticity and a rejection of the "deceitful illusions" (Thorlby 131) of cohesion. It relates closely to Schlegel's concept of what he called Socratic irony, an irony that "is intended to deceive none but those who consider it to be deceptive" (Behler 52).

In Schlegel's terms, an artist must maintain a relationship with contradictions inherent in life, or she will destroy such authenticity and even lose contact with reality (Mellor 15). Such an ironic stance "contains and arouses a feeling of the insoluble conflict between the absolute and relative, the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of a complete account of reality" (52). That impossibility (conveyed by the film's style) and necessity (conveyed by its protagonist's desires) represent the fundamental dialectical tension of Kaufman's film.

The first blatantly obvious indication that the film will undermine such a "complete account" of reality occurs about twenty minutes into its running time. The scene begins with Hazel (Samantha Morton), arguably Caden's "true love" (although it is difficult to think Kaufman would believe in such an idea), driving down an ordinary, well-kept suburban street in the American every-town of Schenectady, New York. She haphazardly parks in front of a bright and cheerful-looking home that appears to be on fire. Smoke billows out its windows in large plumes, and flames lick the windowpanes on its second story (figure 2.1). Hazel glimpses a man in a dark suit through her passenger window as he casually walks by the house and out of frame. He does not seem to notice the fire.

Figure 2.1 The eternally burning house fire creates confusion in the spectator and serves to keep the film squarely in the realm of the fantastic.

Once inside the house, which is decorated uncannily in the style of the 1950s (although the film is set in the present day), Hazel chats with an estate agent. "I've

always loved this house", she remarks. "Yes, it's a wonderful place", the agent replies, as the two walk casually through the space as flames flicker around them. The agent coughs and admits that the sellers are "very motivated". Hazel expresses tentative doubts. "I like it, I do. I'm just really concerned with dying in the fire", she admits meekly. "It's a big decision", the agent replies sympathetically, "how one prefers to die". Smith suggests the fire "seems to represent the imminence of mortality" in the film (252). But it also relates to the illusion of choice. While Deming thinks *Synecdoche* suggests the idea that "the shape of a life is fashioned by choices and responses to what occurs" (197), this idea runs counter to the principle of noumenal chaos—and the ability to function within it by recognising that human will is nothing in the face of it. Imminence, like everything, is subjective—Hazel's death from the house fire does not happen for another thirty years.

Perhaps the main purpose of the house fire and this initial scene is to make clear the film's world operates under the dizzying precepts of profound ambiguity and is working to illicit confusion in the spectator (if not, at this point, its characters). It raises a slew of unavoidable questions. Why are these women calmly, complacently discussing square footage in a house that is burning down around them? Why is the estate agent's adult son hanging around in the basement of a burning home clad only in boxer shorts? In what world does a house on fire necessitate a literal "fire sale"? If the storied town of Schenectady, New York,[12] is a synecdoche of Middle America, its values and hypocrisies, this scene might be taken as a synecdoche for the film as a whole. It defies expectations in a way that, as the narrative progresses, becomes systematic. Typical viewers are now likely scratching their heads, wondering what on earth this could all mean. But their questions will never be answered. Such unanswered questions create profound confusion, "altering the viewer's relationship to what occurs on screen, destabilizing what distinctions one

[12] Schenectady, a bucolic town with a population of 60,000 situated three hours north of New York City (and about 3.5 hours north of Kaufman's hometown of Massapequa), occupies a rather storied position in American culture, particularly for a place its size. Authors as varied as Henry James, Kurt Vonnegut, and Dr. Suess have used it as a setting or as a hometown of major characters. Its official song, "Our Schenectady" (What a warm and friendly place it is to be / Nestled among plains and hills / With a beautiful river that always gives us thrills) is parodied in the opening moments of Kaufman's film. Caden's young daughter is heard singing in voice-over: "I was born there and I'll die there / My first home I hope to buy there / have a kid who'll actually strive there / sweet Schenectady. / And when I'm buried / and I'm dead / Upstate worms will eat my head". Apparently she has absorbed Caden's morbid outlook on life at a very tender age.

makes between the real and surreal" (Deming 195). This specific plot device only gets more confounding in later scenes, including one in which we see Caden and Hazel sharing cocktails in her lounge while the fire still rages, and, decades later, when the fire eventually takes her life as an old woman. (The coroner's deadpan diagnosis as he looks at her blackened throat swab: "Could be smoke inhalation".)

In order to ascertain the theoretic underpinnings of the fantastical components of Kaufman's film, as exemplified by its continually burning fire scenario, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term "fantastic" in its strict, Todorovian sense. For events to be considered fantastic, they must "hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation", creating an ambiguity that becomes a principle theme of the work (Todorov 33). No single explanation can or should be given for their diversions from realism. It is then necessary that the reader or spectator must adopt a certain attitude to the work, rejecting purely "allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations" (33). That is, in the world of the fiction, these things are really occurring. It is not always necessarily that "the hesitation be *represented* within the work", through the experience of a character reacting to events, although it usually is (34).

The fire in *Synecdoche* is not poetic in the sense that it is not clearly allegorical. It exists, simply as a fire, on one narrative level, which is the final condition it must meet to be considered of the fantastic (32). The key element of its fantastic quality is found in the hesitation it elicits on the part of the spectator. Pointedly, the fire is the only "supernatural" occurrence in the film that exists wholly outside of the purview of Caden—every other fantastical event can be read as being a reflection of his subjective experience, a result of his supposed descent into madness. But the fire unequivocally exists outside his mental imaginings; it has not been conjured by Caden's atrophying psyche. Years later, when Caden watches Hazel outside her house, the fire is still raging, its intensity progressing, but at a glacial pace. A fire is a natural event, but here it is unnatural, enduring due to an extreme dilation of time.

Kaufman has noted that the fire scenario often elicits a particularly confused response from audiences:

> People ask, "*Why* the burning house? What *is* the burning house?" I have to say, well, it doesn't *speak* to you. It speaks to other people. I'm trying to let this interaction be personal, in the same way that a dream is personal (Guillén).

The fire, then, functions on the level of a dream image for the spectator (and the director), but not for the characters in the film. Todorov acknowledges that the fantastic is found within the more general category of "ambiguous vision" (33), a phrase that could be considered synonymous with the dream state. Kaufman has referred to the film as operating under "dream logic" ("In and Around Schenectady, New York") specifically as a way of manifesting Caden's interior life without the use of narrative devices like voice over. Such supernatural events as the eternally burning house provoke not only anxiety and even horror on the part of the perceiver, the "phenomenon makes us wonder 'what it means' less than it amazes us by the strangeness of the fact itself" (Todorov 104). This wonderment is the key to taking such occurrences from the realm of the purely marvellous to the fantastic: "the perception of the supernatural casts a heavy shadow over the supernatural itself and makes its access difficult to us" (105). That difficulty, or opacity, renders the fire fantastic.

For Todorov, perception "constitutes a screen rather than removes one" (105)—if the act of perception is foregrounded and the nature of the events perceived remains unknown, this leads to a predominant anxiety (105). *Synecdoche's* fire engenders both *"what are we seeing?"* and *"what does this mean?"* responses; sensation and perception are "transformed into idea" (115). Such a collapse between event and event-perception of space and time highlights the perception-consciousness system of relations between the self and the world (139), including notions of subjectivity, solipsism, and philosophical idealism, "which stresse[s] the mind's power to create its own universe of consciousness, freed from any absolute natural law" (28).

Crucially, the film also adheres to principles of mimetic realism, of "what we think of as the 'real world'" (Deming 195). These include "realistic décor, gritty locations, and generally unglamorous clothes and makeup for the actors" (Hill 217). (Hazel's continually burning house, with its pristine mid-century furnishings in oddly saturated colours, is again exempt from this realism.) Hill qualifies Kaufman's

particular form of fantastic world creation as "synthetic hyperrealist" (217), likening it to a similar aesthetic in the surrealist films of David Lynch. Unsurprisingly, Kaufman is reportedly an admirer of Lynch (Tobias), along with such twentieth-century fantasists as Philip K. Dick and Franz Kafka (Sternbergh). Such surrealist tendencies also relate to the film's ambiguity between extreme subjectivity and a more objective realism in its narration.

"A Series of Mad Visions Perhaps": The Screen as the Site of Confused Subjectivity

According to Freud, a neurotic personality operates on a level of internal anxiety arising from a confluence of internal and external "frustrations" but does not experience any kind of confusion or apprehension regarding his relation to the outside world and his demarcation as separate from it (Freud, "General Theory of Neuroses" 350). While the neurotic might experience "delusions", such delusions make "sense" in the context of "the life of those who produced them" (257–8). Caden Cotard is instantly recognisable as a man of deep-set neuroses, but initially he is portrayed as having a relatively firm grasp on reality and the separation of his inner life from the external world. His hypochondria and death obsession—evidenced by routinely reading the obituaries, seeing a headline about Harold Pinter and assuming it means he is dead, starting the day by pointing out he feels well and that the milk has expired—all point to a neurotic individual, but not a psychotic one. His life has the semblance of normality: He has a full-time job, mounting a production of, appropriately enough, *Death of a Salesman*.[13] He is married to an artist, Adele (Catherine Keener), and has a young daughter, Olive (Sadie Goldstein).

[13] Deming writes that the use of Arthur Miller's famous mid-twentieth-century play "sets the tone of tragic inevitability and melancholia built into the movie" while also pointing to its similar protagonist unfixed in time, since Willy Loman "regularly disappears into flashbacks of earlier stages of his life" (197). Joel Evans also highlights the play's explicit relation to the time-image in its "overt concern with the potentially uneven, disjointed rhythms of time" (332). It shares this in common with other works referenced in Kaufman's film, including Proust's *Swann's Way* and Kafka's *The Trial,* which are both read by Hazel (332). Writing in the *Arthur Miller Journal,* Rebecca Davers suggests even greater thematic resonance with *Synecdoche* and *Salesman* and their two protagonists (see Davers, "I Know How to Do the Play Now").

After hitting his head on an exploding bathroom faucet, Caden receives a diagnosis of a "synaptic degradation" that is "fungal in nature" from a neurologist. His situation briefly becomes more hopeful when he receives a "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation, and decides to write a new, original play about the "brutal truth" of life and death. Pointedly, this occurs after Adele ridicules his staging of *Death of a Salesman* as inauthentic: "It's not you", she says. "It's not anyone". But when Adele and Olive leave Schenectady and Caden for Berlin's bohemian art world, his neuroses begin to take on a more sinister hue. Kaufman provides an early foreshadowing of events through Caden's surname. "Cotard" is a reference to Cotard's Syndrome, a rare disorder in which the sufferer operates under the assumption that he is dead, does not exist, or is putrefying.[14]

The idea of a physical trauma, such as Caden's head injury, resulting in extreme personality or psychological disturbance is something of a cartoonish trope in Hollywood: characters, both animated and "real", throughout cinema and television history have received similar blows to the head resulting not just in amnesia, but in the questioning of their sense of personal identity—in such instances, physical trauma is often connected to emotional trauma (Baxendale). Are we meant to think that the unfolding narrative of the film is a result of Caden's newfound brain damage? It is unlikely, but also unclear.

Separated from his family and becoming increasingly obsessed with his grand artistic plans, Caden begins to lose touch with the external world, and the film reflects this aesthetically. He sees visions of himself in television cartoons, and later in a TV advertisement for a chemotherapy drug. His own image appears in a movie poster. His mental state even seems to physically manifest itself on his own body. Boils appear on his skin; his veins bulge and make odd sounds when touched. Later his teeth appear to be rotting and flesh hangs off his legs.

---

14 An article in the scientific journal *Biological Psychiatry* refers to the case of a 65-year-old sufferer of the syndrome. The woman initially "presented with gradually progressive memory problems" and suicidal thoughts before developing the belief her brain had become "completely rotten" with cancer and finally insisting she was dead (Chatterjee and Mitra 52). Like Caden at his most degraded, she "failed repeatedly to recognize her close acquaintances and had shown significant reduction in her speech output and psychomotor activity" (52).

Such a "collapse between the limits of matter and mind" is considered "the first characteristic of madness" (Todorov 115). It also relates to the idea of pan-signification, one of the fantastic "themes of the self", wherein "the transition from mind to matter has become possible" (114). The confusion found on the site of Caden's body (his afflictions seem to come and go without reason) echoes confusion concerning narrative events in the film. Instances of miscommunication or misunderstanding are a major motif, particularly within dialogue and language in general, such as the instances where Caden confuses the words *ophthalmologist*, *urologist*, and *neurologist*. But the people he talks to often experience the same confusion, misinterpreting his signals. He tells Adele that he thinks he has blood in his stool. "That stool in your office?" she asks, half asleep.

The subject of time is also greatly confused in communication. Adele's friend Maria (Jennifer Jason Leigh), after staying up all night, remarks, "It's really late. Early. It's late." Ambiguous language communication is also a central element in Caden's relationship to his daughter. He has to explain to her the difference between the homonyms "psychosis" and "sycosis" early on in the film, after she notices the pustules on his face (highlighting the correlation between the coming degradation of his body and mind), and she also confuses sewage pipes with smoking pipes. Later, when the adult Olive (Robin Weigert) is on her death bed, the two must communicate via an electronic translation machine, as for some reason she has forgotten her mother tongue after decades of living in Berlin (a city, it should be noted, where English is regularly spoken).[15]

David L. Smith likens the use of language in the film to the idea of the synecdoche itself: "As creatures of language, we live only with parts and can produce only synecdoches" (247). Such a symbolic mode of communication defines a gulf between thing and thing represented, and can never deliver the "whole truth" (247), which is what Caden seeks to convey, through language, in his play. Language lives within the realm of subjectivity, of internal mental process, and not of noumenon. By highlighting miscommunication through language, Kaufman emphasises the gulf

[15] According to a 2012 European Commission report, "At a national level English is the most widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the 25 Member States [of the EU] where it is not an official language" (6). Approximately 56 percent of the German population speaks English, most not as a native language (Eurobarometer 13).

between subjectivities in his film. Schlegel expresses this sentiment when he argues that the structured and rational system of language can never express the fundamental chaos of *Fülle* (Mellor 10). "The mystery of becoming can be linguistically expressed only as hints, cyphers, and hieroglyphs" (10–11), such as the mysterious human nose painted on the giant pink box Caden hopes to give Olive as a present. Such symbolism, which is without any discernible meaning in the film, denotes a "hint at the infinite" while acknowledging the failure to attain it (11).

Todorov characterises language as "[t]he essential event which provokes the shift from the primary mental organization to maturity" (145). In essence, it signals the move from the pre-symbolic to the symbolic. Madness, in turn, correlates with the pre-symbolic, a pre-language infancy. In this state, "the transition between matter and mind has become possible" (114). Thus, the breakdowns in both language and bodily function signify a return to a state of mental infancy, when "the limit between the physical and mental, between matter and spirit, between word [or image] and thing, ceases to be impervious" (113). At her mother's funeral, Caden's future wife, Claire (Michelle Williams), laments that she "used to be a baby" through tears, expressing a tacit desire to return to a pre-language state where the fantastic is still possible.[16] Such a pre-verbal (or pre-symbolic) state represents a return to a feeling of wholeness with the external world, away from the "extreme subjectivity" of self (175). In the Romantic era, madness often represented a "higher form of reason", as in Edgar Allan Poe's remark, "Science has not yet told us whether madness may not be the sublime form of intelligence" (Todorov 39). However, while Kaufman invites his protagonist to experience feelings of sublimity through such fantastic "pan-signification", Caden instead embodies a Romantic pessimism that continually rejects the idea through his self-conscious solipsism.

Language, in spoken and written form, eventually becomes so confused to Caden, his fax machine spews gibberish and the words in books vanish without a trace. This breakdown between matter and mind remains at the level of the fantastic because as spectators we can acknowledge that it represents a transgression of these limits, not

[16] This is a common theme in Kaufman's scripts. In *Adaptation*, Susan Orlean longs to be a baby again so she can be "new", and Joel Barrish in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* actually lives out scenes from his childhood, one as a baby being bathed in a sink.

a purely mythical, allegorical representation (116). The pan-signification it exemplifies contends "relations exist on all levels, among all elements of the world" (112). Objects are imbued with lives of their own via mental and emotional connections. When Caden finds Olive's diary not long after she leaves for Berlin, it is full of the musings of a small child, read in voice-over with Olive's childish intonations. The musings of the adult Olive, read in voice over with a heavy German accent,[17] continue to appear in its pages over the years, even though she is thousands of miles away and has not seen her father since leaving New York.

Physical metamorphosis is also related to the collapse of matter and mind. As Caden's play continues to grow in his attempt to replicate every aspect of his life on his hangar-like stage set, multiple versions of characters come to occupy the world of the film, as they inhabit the play within the film. Caden's embodiment of Ellen, or Sammy's embodiment of Caden, or Tammy's embodiment of Hazel, speaks to the physical manifestation of a multiplicity of internalised personalities within one mind: "We are several persons mentally, we become so physically" (Todorov 116). Ironically, despite the multiplications and replications of personalities, Caden's point of view becomes more and more solely informed by the curious, possibly demented workings of his own brain. According to Edward Branigan, "A first-person recounting of events is an illusion, but one which is bound up with the very conditions which allow us to make sense of the fictional world (Branigan 51). If the first-person account of a fictional world is confused and ambiguous to the character perceiving it, it will necessarily become so to the audience, which identifies with his point-of-view.

Caden's solipsism, and the film's external renderings of the inner workings of his mind (if, indeed, that is what the film's dreamlike images are) further underscores the film's ambiguity. We, like Caden, cannot be sure of what is real and what isn't, if indeed anything is. Kaufman articulates a belief in Schlegel's transcendental

[17] There are multiple references to Germany, Germans, and the German language in the film, from Olive and Adele moving to Berlin (where Caden briefly visits and speaks to a now German-accented Maria) to a German-accented professor reading a melancholy Rilke poem on the radio in the opening scene, to an explicit reference to Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. In a sense, these serve as "Easter eggs", cuing the audience to the various German artists and philosophers whose work Kaufman engages. More generally, they conjure a tone of "German misery", which Marx and Engels characterised as the "predominant" pessimism found in German Romanticism (Behler 46).

"critical idealism" (Mellor 15) when he says, "It's a recognition that that's just the truth […] It's not the world as it is that we are seeing but the world as it's translated by this mound of material in our heads" (Guillén). In these terms, there is no objective truth for the film to relate to its audience. Kaufman even goes so far to suggest a personal flirtation with philosophical idealism, suggesting reality is fundamentally a construct of the individual mind:

> I think it's really interesting that visually the world doesn't exist. It only exists as our brain's interpretation. I sometimes try to imagine what this world looks like without people in it and I don't think it looks like anything. It certainly doesn't look like this (Guillén).

While Kaufman's ideas jibe with various incarnations of German idealism, popularised in the Romantic period by Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, and Schopenhauer (see Mellor, Speight, and Breazeale), they also fit neatly with the concepts of the fantastic. Objects as mere projections of the mind can be seen as expressions of, or connections to, the fantastic's dissolution of the veil between matter and mind, of the "effacement of the limit between subject and object" (Todorov 116). The idea reaches its logical conclusion in the famous thought experiment of the "brain in a vat", which argues that theoretically, there is no way of knowing if individual experience is not merely the result of a sentient brain being hooked up to electrodes to stimulate mental activity, simply giving the impression that an experience in external reality is occurring (Putnam 8).

Given this scenario's adjacent position to death (at least the death of the body), it is tempting to consider the idea that Caden is already dead and his experiences are merely expressions of his mind's last delirious gasps of consciousness. The most overt implication of this occurs when he visits his therapist, Madeline Gravis (Hope Davis). The severity of her name is an ironic twist on her frivolous notions of therapy and happiness, but also points to grave potentialities: "Why did he kill himself?" Caden inquires about the child author of the bestseller *Little Winky*. "I don't know. Why did you?" she replies. He asks her to repeat herself. "Why would you?" she answers. Perhaps Caden misheard her the first time, and we heard what he did through a subjective alignment, or perhaps she changed her answer. The death hypothesis is never revealed as truth, however, and this is integral to maintaining the

sustained hesitation that the fantastic requires. Caden's solipsism stretches to the extent that whole characters are suggested illusions, such as Kaufman's insistence that the character of Ellen is a figment of Caden's imagination (Guillén). While both the actor Millicent Weems (Dianne Wiest) and Caden himself embody Ellen at certain points, the "real" Ellen is never revealed—her various representations are themselves truly simulacrum, signifiers without signified, copies without an original.

At one point Caden considers naming his untitled play *The Simulacrum*. This is of course a reference to Baudrillard's postmodernist work *Simulacra and Simulations*. Evans suggests Caden's play illustrates Baudrillard's conception of the final order of simulacrum, when a thing "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 5) and "the mimetic relationship between the real and its representation" has broken down, affecting the very nature of reality itself (Evans 327). Caden's work, which becomes his life, represents both simulacrum and synecdoche, "in which parts and wholes, reality and mimicry, outside and inside collapse into one another" (328). There is no longer an objective vantage point of reality from which to view its various mirrors and permutations. It becomes simply a morass of signs and symbols while the referents are lost. This is the space of indeterminacy from which the postmodern operates; Kaufman emphasises this idea with a refusal to include establishing shots to create a fixed space from which to consider his created world.

Caden's artistic recreations of his life in his art operate under the fantastic's "themes of vision", which are antithetical to the principles of reason (Todorov 122). A complete, full-sized replica of New York, which contains a full-sized replica (via its recreation of the warehouse set), which contains a full-sized replica, on to infinity, is spatially impossible.[18] Todorov considers these themes examples of "indirect, distorted, subverted vision" (122). This preoccupation with distorted vision can also be seen in the specialised microscope-like glasses used to view Adele's miniscule paintings, which grower smaller and smaller as the film progresses, as Caden's

[18] The logistics of the sets within sets within sets proved a significant challenge for the film's script supervisor, Mary Cybulski, who created detailed diagrams of each space within space in order to log which scenes occur in which sets. On her chart, there are no fewer than five iterations of the warehouse set, each one inhabiting a different state of physical completion ("In and Around Synecdoche, New York").

project grows larger and larger (figure 2.2). This "distorted" vision is ambiguously a symptom of Caden's madness, but, as in Nerval's *Aurélia*, we are never sure if this madness might actually constitute a quality of perception of "the superlative, the excessive" (93) that is unavailable to those who do not view the world through extraordinary eyes.

If he has such a superlative vision, Caden seems too "fixated on the limits of the self" (Mellor 39) to impart it to others. Like Byron's protagonist in *Cain*, Caden is obsessed with death and the limitations of life (39). His physical breakdowns can be read as an expression of his mental state, one of "ironic pessimism" (39). "Cain […] is a pure ironist, for whom self-consciousness is only a melancholy conviction of loss and death", writes Mellor (39). The same can be said of Caden (whose name even recalls Byron's tragic biblical hero), who denies the "renewal of life" (39) offered in the potentially redemptive love of Hazel. One of the sustained ironies in the film relates to the imaginative subjectivity of its narrative—ambiguously a product of Caden's newly explosive mental processes—and Caden's lack of imagination when it comes to his creative endeavours. Kaufman relates this to Caden's incapability of interpreting his newfound ways of seeing: "Caden's work is so literal. The only way he can reflect reality in his mind is by imitating it full-size […] It's a dream image but he's not interacting with it successfully" (Guillén).

Figure 2.2 Adele's miniature art is the opposite of Caden's, which tries to replicate reality as a whole.

Caden personifies the negative side of *Weltschmerz* as his self-absorbed egoism leads him to become "detached, insulated", even as he longs for the ability to feel part of the totality of humankind (Thorslev 89). As he puts it in an impassioned speech to Hazel, "We're all in the same water, after all, soaking in our very menstrual blood and nocturnal emissions. This is what I want to try to give people". But Caden is so obsessed with himself, and his own mortality, he has little actual interest in other people. Hazel obviously longs for a romantic relationship with Caden, but he is too absorbed in creating an artwork *about* connection to embark on his own. If "the very passion of the egoism of the *Weltschmerzler* usually makes him involve the whole world in his peculiar plight" (88), Caden goes so far to create his own world in order to realise such a myopic search for self. The world he creates has the dizzying effect of further complicating his existence and relation to the revelation of truth, however. One of the ways in which Kaufman creates such a relation to ambiguous alternate realities is in the film's use of the mise en abyme, which generates spatial confusion through mirroring effects.

The Mise en Abyme and the Mathematical Sublime

Kaufman, as a screenwriter and filmmaker, remains preoccupied with the metaphysical nature of illusion and reality. "I don't even know that I exist, let alone what's happening", he suggests (Huddleston). As a stylistic device, the mise en abyme helps elucidate the confusion between illusion and reality found in *Synecdoche, New York*. Robert Stam defines the mise en abyme as "the infinite regress of mirror reflections to denote the literary, painterly, or filmic process by which a passage, a section, or sequence plays out in miniature the processes of the text as a whole" (Stam xiv). Such an infinite regress "knows no bounds" (Evans 326). In the film it is a product of Caden's "obsessive" desire for an endless replication of exact copies of "real" objects (326). Caden's production creates identical sets within sets, so that the supposed entirety of the first set is included in the one inside of it (figure 2.3). These are at once "miniatures" of the larger sets, but paradoxically contain the latter, theoretically ad infinitum. Evans contends that in the film these replications suggest a "fixed subjectivity" rather than the postmodern "fashionable, uncertain, shattered self" (327). This is manifested by Caden's desire

to embody such a fixed subjectivity as the nature of reality around him becomes disjointed and his very body begins to turn on itself.

Figure 2.3 Caden's grand theatre project involves physical impossibility: a life-size replica of New York City within a warehouse in New York City.

If such an infinite regress can seem positively "dizzying" (Metz, *Film Language* 232), the spectator must suffer this vertigo by considering the aesthetic mirroring effects that the play within the film creates, which multiplies the heightened sense of delirium and confusion caused by a confrontation with the infinite. Literally translated "abyme" means "abyss" or "chasm" (231), and that evocation of the sublime terror of the infinite, be it massive or infinitesimal, is integral to the workings of Kaufman's film. In the *Critique of Judgment,* Kant describes what he refers to as the "mathematical sublime" (Kant 84), a specific form of sublimity related to "spatial or temporal magnitude" (Shaw 81). When an individual is confronted with an object or experience, he first perceives through "sensible intuition" based on *a priori* knowledge of the world that all beings automatically possess. In turn, this intuition is first "synthesized" through the imagination, and subsequently "thought through" to understanding (Shaw 65).

When an object or experience is too much for the imagination to comprehend, however, the subject is struck with a sublime feeling. This in turn activates the mind's capacity to reason, to abstractly conceptualise not only the unpresentability of an object but the very fact that the mind itself is capable of the process of abstract conceptualisation.

"The mere ability even to think it as *a whole* indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense" (Kant 85, his emphasis); that is, it is based in a higher mental function than sensation, that of reason. Thus the sublime leads to a feeling within the individual of his own power over nature, as well as his separateness from it (Shaw 74). It is a feeling of freedom tinged with sadness, both emotions the result of being released from purely terrestrial bonds in a shift of view from "world to mind" (73). Essentially the sublime is an experience of pain followed by "a powerful sense of relief" (83). Serving as a seed to the process, imagination plays a critical role, leading to a distinct emotional experience that is, by definition, a solitary one.

Caden, unlike the spectator, does not possess mastery over his own thoughts or experiences, and is instead plunged into an existential nightmare. While we enjoy our place of remove from the action, Caden has to contend with the pure terror of unreason. (Kaufman originally conceived *Synecdoche* after being approached about writing a "horror film") (Moriarty). His artistic quest is really anti-sublime—he seeks to "present the unpresentable" (Lyotard 43)—the totality of his life. Conversely, his ex-wife Adele literally illustrates the idea of "sensible objects" (43) that know their limitations, tiny portraits of the people in her life. Adele becomes a roaring success, while Caden seems cursed to wander in his own purgatory. A synecdoche is meant to be a *part* taken to *represent* the whole, not the whole itself. Adele's paintings, which are so minute as to require special visual apparatus for viewing (requiring a different way of seeing), support the Blakean idea of a sublime microcosm, as in the opening stanza of Blake's 1803 poem, "The Auguries of Innocence": "To see a world in a grain of sand / And heaven in a wild flower / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / And eternity in an hour".

Adele's art represents tiny snippets of moments in time illuminated by her subjective experience. They are akin to Schlegel's idea of the "fragment": a "single, complete idea" that refuses to impose a "false system or an unjustified rational order" (Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* 21). The goal of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays, in similar fashion to Schlegel, was to create "subjective verisimilitude" without completeness or resolution, portraying "a mind in motion" (Smith 242).

Caden, in contrast, attempts to "conjure a whole from the parts" (240)—to experience the totality of his life while he is still living it. Constructing from a seemingly infinite number of tiny snippets, he attempts to arrange a cohesive, truthful whole.

Figure 2.4 Caden wanders through the burned-out shell of his play as a solitary figure experiencing death-in-life.

It is a fool's game, and perhaps that is why he hangs it up and decides to live the life of a maid (or at least play her role), one who simply struggles with day-to-day menial tasks while regretting her past sins. These scenes of Caden wandering through life as Hazel (figure 2.4) are indicative of the "Wandering Jew" motif, a familiar one in German Romanticism (Hartman, "Romanticism and Anti-Self-Consciousness'" 51). As in Byron's *Manfred*, it epitomises Caden's tragic-ironic "death wish" or "longing for self-oblivion" found within *Weltschmerz* (Mellor 170), a release from the desire for the infinite in the face of life's finitude (Behler 45). The Wandering Jew figure is always solitary, "separated from life in the midst of life" (Hartman 51), trapped by the alienating burden of self-consciousness (51).

This highlights a major theme of Kaufman's film: Caden is burdened by his separation from other people due to his extreme solipsism, but he also struggles to hold onto such a "Romantic 'I'" when his "certainty and simplicity of self" begins to crumble (51).

Figure 2.5 Caden and Hazel observe their doppelgangers act in a play that has essentially become the only form of existence for their real and fictional selves.

It remains a mystery why Caden thinks he can reconstruct a sense of a core self by getting someone else to play him, but perhaps his goal is to study himself from the "outside" in order to get an objective idea of his troubles. As Rebecca Davers suggests, "The film audience recognizes that Caden may […] be trying to 'trace […] back to its source' the unhappiness that seems to define him" (Davers 37). Unsurprisingly, things become more confused for Caden, not less. Multiple doppelgangers (Cadens, Hazels, Ellens) form the core of the narrative confusion in the latter half of the film, lending a human component to the idea of infinite replication (figure 2.5).

Argentine modernist author Jorge Luis Borges, whose story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" recounts the discovery of an encyclopaedia based on an imaginary, idealist world, sees a curious law of diminishing returns related to the idea of mise en abyme. The text within the story recounts the concept of the *hrönir*, the duplicates of lost objects that are "awkward in form" and "somewhat longer" than the originals (Borges 38). These *hrönir* have "made possible the interrogation and even the modification of the past, which is no less plastic and docile than the future" (38). The *hrönir* exhibit an irregular form of quality control as they are replicated:

> Curiously, the *hrönir* of second and third degree—the *hrönir* derived from another *hrön*, those derived from the *hrön* of a *hrön*—exaggerate the aberrations of the initial one; those of fifth degree are almost uniform; those of ninth degree become confused with those of the second; in those of the eleventh there is a purity of line not found in the original. The process is cyclical: the *hrön* of the twelfth degree begins to fall off in quality (38-39).

This endless series of mirrored objects is a metaphor for problematising identity: the loss of identity as a result of replication itself. Who is the real Caden? Is this Caden or Caden playing Ellen or Caden playing Millicent playing Ellen? Why is the "real" Hazel attracted to the "fake" Caden? Is the fake Hazel a proper substitute for the real one? "Things became duplicated in Tlön", writes Borges, "they also tend to become effaced and lose their details when they are forgotten" (39). This brings to mind Kaufman's screenplay for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* in which details of mise-en-scène, like shop signs and book jackets, fade away to nothing as Joel Barrish's memories are erased. It also speaks to the notion of idealism that is at the core of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and a great deal of Borges' magical realism, a notion that the world is simply a solipsistic projection of our own mind, in which fantastical, irrational elements arise to remind us of the fiction in which we live (Barth 75).

Caden, unlike Borges, is a self-referential artist who both fears and refutes such infinite possibilities. He is obsessed with the idea of art as replication and reconstruction, of reconstituting his own life as it is lived minute by minute, in the way that it happened, the "only" way that it can happen. Consumed by the fear of future failure, and the regret of his failures in the past, he must assert the primacy of his one true timeline, free from Borgesian difference. Kaufman, however, refuses to grant him his wish. Instead, he questions Caden's power as an artist through his relation to personal inauthenticity.

Regardless of the actual status of Caden's existence (whether he is dead, alive in a dream reality, or in some sort of status in between), he does not exist authentically. Instead he is consumed by his "art", which is simply a meticulous recreation of his life. That fear of inauthenticity, of not engaging vitally with an emotionally resonant existence, is a hallmark of Romantic thought (Milnes and Sinanan 5). In purely

Romantic terms, Caden has failed both as an artist and as a human being due to his lack of authentic engagement with his life. He rarely lives with "self-awareness", and lacks the conscious ability to make choices for himself (Hill 210).

The very degradation of Caden's body is a factor in, or a result of, his inability to act. Caden is so overwhelmed and incapacitated by his circumstances that he has to do "biofeedback" exercises to produce saliva and needs eye drops to create enough moisture to cry, experiencing as he is a kind of emotional, existential shock. As an artist, Caden seeks Truth—another word for authenticity—and he mounts his play in order to make a grand, overarching statement about the very nature of life and death. Surely, a man bestowed a "genius grant" would have something grandly important, perhaps even eternal, to say about such all-encompassing themes. But Caden cannot slavishly re-create his own life and in any way access the truth, which is defined by change.

In an 1813 love letter to Annabella Milbanke, Byron summarised a sort of treatise on his own state of perpetual discontentment:

> You don't like my 'restless' doctrines—I should be very sorry if *you* did—but *I* can't *stagnate* nevertheless—if I must set sail let it be on the ocean no matter how stormy—anything but a dull cruise on a level lake without ever losing sight of the same insipid shores by which it is surrounded (Byron, *Letters* 119, his emphasis).

Byron himself has been accused of his own "implacable nihilism" (McGann 76). Such a nihilism, however, is very different from that of Caden Cotard's. Daniel Shaw refers to Caden's "passive nihilism" (Shaw 256), which "shrinks from the chaos of existence" in favour of a search for "resignation and acceptance" (256). In contrast, Kaufman's (and Byron's) "active" nihilism "clears away the obsolete 'Idols of the Marketplace' in order to prepare the ground for new, contemporary values" (256). In other words, it embraces chaos as a means of rebirth and re-signification.

David L. Smith relates Kaufman's work to the Nietzschean idea of *amor fati,* a way to "transform a sense of entrapment in life's limitations" via an "ecstatic affirmation" of them (245). Such a perspective can provide "a naturalistic mode of

transcendence" due to the recognition of the futility of creating worlds without flaws (244). *Amor fati* evokes sublimity via the knowledge of our own limitations. While Shaw sees Kaufman's film as a failure due to its protagonist's "deer-caught-in-the-headlights powerlessness" (265), I argue that Kaufman's own active nihilism operates in a continual dialectic without synthesis—in Romantic ironic fashion—with Caden's passive nihilism.

The concept of *amor fati* can be traced to Schlegelian irony in its representation of *affirmative* thought, active and creative, rather than reactive and passive. Caden's insistence on describing and re-describing the world as it "is" (or was) renders his life as a collection of lifeless signs. Perhaps this is the clearest connection to the hypothesis that he is already dead. He is certainly *creatively* dead. Caden, the great artistic "genius" and seeker of truth, is really a conformist. As a result, he is doomed to failure, wandering alone in an empty, post-apocalyptic dreamscape of his own creation. Without the freedom of creation and new possibilities, art, and life, become as inert as an empty stage.

Conclusion

In Schlegel's terms, Caden has failed to "maintain a relationship with contradictions inherent in life" (Mellor 15) and has thus become inauthentic. But Kaufman has created a film that simultaneously allows him to both engage with a more pessimistic version of himself and also assert his own belief in contradiction and ambiguity. *Synecdoche, New York* is a film that utilises Romantic irony on a metatextual level, between the film's creator and the creator of the play within the film. It does not accomplish this through overt metatextual devices, such as the introduction of screenwriter "Charlie Kaufman" in *Adaptation*.

Rather, its irony is achieved in less obvious ways. The film "evokes transcendence by oblique means and inspires reflection on the strategies by which transcendence is pursued" (Smith 245). In the mode of philosophical irony, it is a "poem [film] as an unresolved debate" (Mellor 22), both at the level of style and ideology. Kaufman does not pass judgment on his character—indeed, our sympathies are generally aligned with him through a subjective point of view—but he does question his

ability to be authentic. Through our aligned sympathies with Caden, the spectator comes to see him as a tragic figure—he wants what we all want, permanence and wholeness, but unconsciously we realise impermanence is the only constant.

Caden's art does not participate in the fertile chaos of life, so his mental workings force him to do so as a sort of corrective measure. Yet he is unable to embrace the chaos Kaufman creates due to the belief that he can have full mastery over time and space and somehow access absolute truth. While Caden seeks to harness the power of godlike creation, the failure of his play and life is due to his lack of ability to see beyond the possible world and seize the possibilities of the fantastic one. This is where autobiographical similarities between art and artist diverge, for Kaufman fearlessly delves into impossible worlds with seemingly unmitigated enthusiasm and imagination.

That is not to say the film does not portray the same anxieties that plague Caden's worldview. But instead of shrinking from those anxieties, Kaufman's film confronts them, acknowledging the inexplicability of the project of life (and death) while forcing its audience to do the same. It is an active questioning that refuses to come up with easy answers, or indeed any answers at all. Answers, cohesion, and a lack of confusion define narrative completeness and the passivity of traditional narrative realism. But even as culturally coded notions of what signals the portrayal of reality in fiction are questioned, an emotional resonance remains.

Emotion and imagination offer keys to portrayals of intersubjectivity and sublimity in Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* and Spike Jonze's *Her*. In the next chapter, I will explore sublimity directly in relation to these films, through a discussion of the "feminine" and "egotistical" sublimes.

III

Beautiful Girls and the Invisible Woman: Emotion, Imagination, and the Feminine Sublime in *The Virgin Suicides* and *Her*

The stars awaken a certain reverence,
Because though always present, they are inaccessible
–Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836)

Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* and Spike Jonze's *Her* both provide examinations of sublimity in relation to gender. They do so chiefly through the aesthetic portrayal of emotion, both the onscreen emotions of their characters and the eliciting of emotional responses in the viewer, and varied approaches to intersubjectivity and imagination. In this chapter, I will examine these films in relation to the concept of the feminine sublime, as both a reaction and reproach to the stereotypical egotism and masculinity of the Romantic sublime and an attempt to create new modes of sublime expression—ones that perhaps include a space for the feminine.

Based on the 1993 novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, Sofia Coppola's 1999 film *The Virgin Suicides* examines sublimity via its presentation of the Romantic egotistical sublime, where constructions of femininity become sublime through the vivid, fantastical imaginings of a group of teenage boys. These boys feel deeply for a group of doomed teenage sisters, but suffer from a profound inability to express or even understand their feelings, as does the rest of their suburban community. The film's highly stylised and aestheticized portrayal of emotion leads to the spectator's confused engagement with its affective content, which creates an emotional distance that mirrors the frustrated emotional engagement depicted onscreen.

I discuss the ways Coppola's film engages with emotion and intersubjectivity via a reading of Lotte Eisner's concept of *Stimmung* (inspired in part by the writings of early German Romantic writer Novalis) as well as overall tone and mood creation. Its emotionally hollowed-out characters become emblematic of the malaise and decline of post-war American society as a whole. The film's alternative feminine or "everyday" sublime lies in its expression of the girls' quotidian realities and an

emphasis on highly feminised surface decoration. Its veneration of the aesthetic concept of the "pretty", as outlined by Rosalind Galt, acts as a subversive formal counterpoint to traditional "masculine" modes of filmic realism. This presentation is ambivalent, however; it speaks not only to a celebration of femininity but also to its commodification. Ultimately, the film's girls assert their own subjectivity by performatively committing mass suicide as a way of passing judgment on a society that values social conformism over human feeling. The mood created by the film is one of emotional ambivalence, with its ultimate "emotional core" expressed as the sense of communal trauma.

In Spike Jonze's 2013 film *Her,* the sublime is found in what cannot be seen—specifically in the disembodied voice of a computer operating system named "Samantha", who allows the film's protagonist, Theodore, to regain his personal creative power through imagination in the fashion of Romantic sublimity. At the beginning of the film, Theodore is stuck within the confines of his own memory, imagining the same moments of a happier past over and over again while despairing in the present. His relationship with Samantha allows his imagination to become purposeful and authentic again. Samantha, in turn, exemplifies a radical rethinking of the isolating Romantic sublime: the sublimity she experiences is a communal one—a feminine sublime comprised of infinite, heterogeneous selves operating through ecstatic, intersubjective connection.

Through an engagement with character and mise-en-scène I examine how Jonze's film plays with these two seemingly antithetical versions of sublimity in order to address both subjectivity and the desire for intersubjective connection in a post-industrial landscape. *Her* grapples with the idea of what it means to be a person, but it is more concerned with how a self in the world can meaningfully connect with other selves while retaining a sense of personal identity. The film addresses the philosophical problem of other minds, especially as it relates to Romantic thought. Its ultimately untenable central relationship leads to an expression of sublimity more tuned to the feminine sublime through intersubjective connection based on self-willed acknowledgment of other minds.

Romantic views of the sublime (as well as of the beautiful) were heavily influenced both by Edmund Burke's 1757 treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, covered in chapter one, and Immanuel Kant's "The Analytic of the Sublime" in *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), which I address in chapter two. Drawing on the previous discussions from these chapters, I begin by outlining the concepts of the Romantic (egotistical) sublime before exploring alternative "feminine" expressions of sublimity.

The Romantic Sublime: Mind over Matter

According to Anne Mellor, both Burke and Kant "implicitly gendered the sublime as an experience of masculine struggle and empowerment" (Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* 87). In contrast, they marginalised the feminine, which was associated with the realm of the beautiful, in favour of the philosophical primacy of this sublimity (108). Romantic thinkers adopted these views readily. Seen as the key to transcendent human experience, especially the experience of the artist or creative genius, the Romantic sublime is strongly solitary, subjective, internal, and even anti-social (Shaw 106).

In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime,* Kant diminishes the feminine and beauty in favour of masculine power: "The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a *beautiful understanding,* whereas ours should be a *deep understanding*, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime" (Kant 36, his emphasis). Such a "beautiful understanding" is a virtue of the social and the sensible, but fails to reach the profound transcendence of sublimity. Viewing sublimity as more than the Burkean concept of terrified delight experienced at a safe remove (Burke 62), the Romantics stressed the primacy of the mind in the creation of the sublime and emphasised the role of imagination. Coleridge encapsulates this Romantic view of sublimity:

> I meet, I find the Beautiful—but I give, contribute, or rather attribute the Sublime. No object of Sense is sublime in itself: but only so far as I make it a symbol of some Idea. The circle is a beautiful figure in itself; it becomes sublime, when I contemplate eternity under that figure (Raysor and Coleridge 532–533).

According to Coleridge, "nothing that has shape can be sublime except by metaphor" (533). Sublimity lies in the contemplation of an object by the subject, not within the object itself. In this sense, as Coleridge suggests, the beautiful is capable of conjuring sublime feeling in the mind of its perceiver.

While German idealism, which I explore in chapter two, focuses primarily on the "failure" of imagination and a desire to overcome the split between the mind and the external world through art (Shaw 90–92), English poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth sought to overcome such dualism to focus on the self: on "the insistent lyrical 'I'" (Shaw 100) whose imaginative capacity was responsible for the "eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 167). Coleridge's affirmation of a godlike, sublime subjectivity in this quotation attests not only to the egotism of the Romantic sublime, but also to what Wordsworth refers to as the "awful power" of imagination (Wordsworth, *Prelude* 217).

Such power even becomes a potential danger—it "threatens to extinguish not only the evidence of the senses, but also the experience of time and, by extension, the consciousness of self" (Shaw 101). This is the precipice that sublime feeling leads the subject to approach, stare over, and contemplate: the annihilation of self-consciousness, a terrifying evocation of the loss of subjectivity. But in the province of Wordsworth and Coleridge, sublime transcendence was characterised "not by fear and trembling, but rather by a deep awe and a profound joy" (Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* 89). Wordsworth's sublime seeks to flirt with this sense of self-destruction by engaging the imagination and then containing it. Imagination to Wordsworth represented "reason in her most exalted mood" (Wordsworth, *Prelude* 468), affirming the power of the 'I' and its ability to stare into the "vale of non-sense" and emerge triumphant by evoking the very subjectivity that the sublime has the potential to erase (Shaw 103). In the Romantic sublime, reason and imagination enter into a complementary "pact" (85) in order to elevate the subject's sense of power and self.

Conversely, the feminine lies in Kant's idea of "sensible intuition", phenomenal perception unmediated by intellect that is natural, sensual, and corporal (Shaw 74). The feminine is relegated to another domain entirely, that of the beautiful—of

sensibility (emotion and affect) over sense (reason). However, in the eighteenth century, alternatives to this egotistical version of the sublime offered various rebuttals, disavowals, and re-appropriations from various women novelists and poets.

Turning on "Pacific Detachment": The Feminine Sublime

It becomes clear from descriptions of the Romantic sublime that its relation to the feminine is more than a little problematic—essentially, it relegates femininity (and by extension, the female) to both the aesthetic and philosophical margins. However, in the Romantic era many female writers engaged in alternative concepts of the sublime in reaction to this canonical form of sublimity. The "feminine sublime" embraced by authors like Felicia Hemans (b.1793–d.1835)—who at her height was the most popular poet save for Lord Byron (Mellor 123)—was a decidedly less solitary, violent, and egotistical one. As well, the wildly successful Ann Radcliffe's (b.1764–d.1823) Gothic imaginings "implicitly rejected the egotistical sublime" (Mellor 11). Instead,

> for Radcliffe and other female Gothic writers, the contemplation of the sublime leads to an affirmation of the feminine. Rather than battling to the death with a patriarchal rival for possession of the violated mother, the feminine sublime turns on pacific detachment, an awakening to virtue and the ethics of integrity (Shaw 109).

"Virtue" and "the ethics of integrity" clearly invoke the social realm, one that the egotistical sublime refuses to engage. But there is also a troubling passivity to such a conception of femininity.

In contrast, poet and novelist Charlotte Smith (b.1749–d.1806) actually appropriates the tropes of the masculine Romantic sublime in service of her own feminine subjectivity. In perhaps her most famous poem, the posthumously published "Beachy Head" (1807), Smith self-identifies with the sublime and "the overcoming of restrictions, even to the point of death" as "a means of converting unlettered weakness into a token of visionary power" (Shaw 113, 114). The poem, however, also undercuts such sublime vision in its final stanzas by descending from the

heights of the titular Beachy Head to focus on a hermit in the cave below, thus evading any final "transcendent elevation" (Lokke 39). Smith's poem ultimately offers an ironic rebuke of the Romantic sublime with its "refusal of the distance and detachment necessary for the masculine sublime and […] re-inscription of the human into the natural" (39). According to Anne Mellor, the triumph of the "masculine" imagination over "feminine Nature" in the Romantic sublime "usurped Nature's power, leaving her silenced, even absent" and "erase[d] the female from discourse" (Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* 18, 19). But the marginalisation wasn't so much an erasure as it was an absorption of "womanly" attributes into the poet's masculine self.

Male Romantic poets subjugated the female further by appropriating emotion as a key trait of the transcendent male ego; the poet became a "mother" and the work of art a "child in the mother's womb" (24). According to Alan Richardson, in the new post-Enlightenment "Age of Feeling", these writers "drew on memories and fantasies of identification with the mother in order to colonize the conventionally feminine domain of sensibility" (Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine" 13). Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* outlined the male Romantic poet's new manifesto of feeling and empathy succinctly: "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively […] the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" (Shelley 13). Emotion became a tactical tool in the male Romantic's arsenal of expression to the exclusion of the female, and expressions of emotion became part of the male poet's multivalent personality. Women in this construct still feel, of course, just not quite so *deeply*—the transcendence of the sublime remained out of their grasp.

Romantic love generally culminated with the "assimilation of the female into the male" in that "the woman must finally be enslaved or destroyed, must disappear or die" (Mellor 26) to avoid becoming a threat to the masculine ego. Various female authors of the age confronted this sense of impending obliteration found within the Romantic sublime, both directly and indirectly. Mary Shelley parodied its narcissism through Victor Frankenstein, in his perverse attempts to "appropriate the feminine" (22) through a desire to create life outside the womb, while the Gothicism of the

Brontë sisters and Radcliffe articulated how such a "patriarchal" sublime leads to an obliteration of the female psyche (Shaw 108).

The struggle to wrest the Romantic sublime from the sole province of the masculine, or to question its narcissistic conceits entirely, is an enduring one, despite its relegation to the margins in Romantic criticism. Both the films I discuss in this chapter grapple with interpretations of sublimity. In the majority of her work, Coppola highlights detail historically considered the province of the feminine. Throughout, a conflict remains between the desire to privilege the daily realities of the feminine, and "difference" in general, while also acknowledging its commodification. Coppola's oeuvre has consistently been preoccupied with the dangers of bringing this domestic, or everyday, sublime into the public sphere, with the transgression leading at turns to death (in *The Virgin Suicides* and 2006's *Marie Antoinette*) and incarceration (in 20013's *The Bling Ring*), although *Lost in Translation* (2003) offers an optimistic portrayal through its flaneuse protagonist.

The Virgin Suicides engages with Hemens' version of the everyday sublime in its expressions of near-ecstatic communal femininity, while its Gothic allusions and female appropriation of masculine sublime tropes ultimately offer an ironic rejoinder to egotistical sublimity. Coppola's film captures the solitude of sublime feeling without its sense of elevation and exaltation, instead infusing it with a palpable melancholy in the vein of Charlotte Smith.

The Virgin Suicides: Staging the Sublime in Seventies Suburbia

Coppola's feature debut was well received, although some critics quibbled with its perceived insubstantiality—that is, its focus on mood to the detriment of narrative and character. *The Guardian* declares it has a "strange and slightly unwholesome intensity, one part sophomoric mawkishness to four parts humid adolescent longing", derides its tragic ending as "excessive", but awards points for avoiding "coming-of-age clichés" (Bradshaw). The *New York Times'* argues that Coppola "create[s] a feature film essentially without characters or a story", yet "hold[s] the viewer's interest through moods, associations and resonant images", while ultimately insisting she is "hamstrung" by Eugenides' novel and its "clammy chill of

aestheticism" (Scott). More positively, *Sight and Sound* calls the film a "timelessly romantic suburban myth" that "delights in the layers of mystique and accretions of physical detail" of its doomed "beautiful schoolgirls" (Fuller).

Academic criticism also primarily focuses on the film's mood and emotional content. Anna Backman Rogers writes about the film in relation to crisis, ritual, and Gilles Deleuze's notions of cliché, particularly the clichéd image, which she argues the film uses to underscore the traumatic loss of freedom incurred in adolescence (24). Masafumi Monden, in his analysis of the film related to notions of girlhood, writes that it "fuses and merges the antithetical poles of fragile and assertive girlish femininity" (145) and "leaves 'girlhood' and girlish femininity as something alluring and mystical" (155). Michele Aaron more critically views the film as supporting what she calls the "necromanticism" of femininity—the romantic linking of the feminine and death (76–77). Bree Hoskin explores the film's "compulsive repetition" through modes of nostalgia (216), and connects its themes of "anxiety and longing" and "fear and desire" to the Gothic tradition of excess (214, 218).

The Virgin Suicides version of that Gothic excess exchanges the windswept, desolate landscapes of authors such as Shelley, Emily Brontë, and Radcliffe for a metaphorically-cum-literally suffocating suburban milieu, a subgenre sometimes referred to as "suburban Gothic" (Hoskin 214). That suffocation is nearly all-encompassing; Coppola's film is emotionally contained in a way that belies its subject matter: the mass suicide of a group of teenage sisters, an act that makes an irreparable impact on the teenage boys of an affluent Michigan suburb in the 1970s.

Throughout the film the girls are viewed from a distance as sublime objects: unfathomable, unknowable, designed to imbue the Romantic male psyche with the knowledge of its power of imagination and reason. Seen from the outside, despite their eventual literal imprisonment in the family home, and viewed almost solely from the perspective of the towns' boys, the girls are also presented as a mysterious object of study for the spectator. A narrator, one of the boys now grown, recalls the events that take place over the course of a fateful year from the perspective of the present day. Even before those tragic events unfurl, the Lisbon girls, he explains, had been subject of great fascination for the community's young males, although the

reason is never fully expressed. The boys seem to respond to the alien, distant, and cloistered quality of the girls, which supplies a tabula rasa they can project their frustrated feelings on, captivating their imaginations. Trapped in their constricting suburban enclave of privilege, they long for an emotional, Romantic fixation.

The boys obsess over the girls, studying them like veritable exhibits. (The source novel goes so far as to list their purloined artefacts by exhibit numbers and characterises their organs, upon autopsy, as "like something behind glass […] like an exhibit") (Eugenides 221). But despite their attempts, the boys never gain real knowledge as to the inner life of the girls. Moreover, the film clearly conveys the sense that the boys do not really have an interest in truly coming to see the girls as real people, for that would ruin their sublime effect. "They understood love, and even death […] we couldn't fathom them at all", the unnamed narrator recounts. This inscrutability accounts for their enduring sublime fascination, twenty-five years after their deaths.

The girls seem to communicate to outsiders, and themselves, solely by sensual, intuitive means, the province of the feminine and of the natural. The boys internalise these intuitions into "reasonable" knowledge through their imaginative capacities: one smells a lipstick tube on the sly and receives a vision of the 14-year-old, Lolita-esque Lux[19] (Kirsten Dunst), as if deeply inhaling her very essence through her cosmetics, totemic objects that in reality speak to nothing but her surface beauty. The boys insist they want to learn the girls' very nature, but the idea of their menstruation (conjured by a bathroom cupboard well-stocked with tampons) is enough to make one of them flee the Lisbon house in terror. This is a potent example of the sublime, which "alternates between attraction and repulsion" unlike

[19] Many critics have discussed Lux's obvious relation to Nabokov's (and Stanley Kubrick's, in his film adaptation) character, the teenage "nymphette" Lolita, emphasizing her naïve yet knowing sexuality. Backman Rogers references Lolita's "infantilized sexuality" (25), while Monden writes that, like Lolita, Lux is "manipulative, flirtatious, coquettish and above all, self-assured yet innocent, and she seems to be comfortable with that image" (146). The *New York Time*'s A.O. Scott refers specifically to Kubrick's film: "Like Sue Lyon in Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita,* with her lollipop and heart-shaped sunglasses, Ms Dunst turns Lux's every glance and gesture into an ambiguous provocation" (Scott).

the straightforward appeal of beauty (Shaw 79). The boys idealise the girls' beauty but fear their alien quality; it remains sublimely terrifying even as they seek the revelation of its secrets.

When the boys engage their imaginations while fantasising about the girls, they envision the ridiculous kitsch of 1970s soft-rock album covers: the girls frolic in grassy fields with unicorns, their prairie sundresses backlit by rich sunlight as they chew on blades of grass, laugh, or stare wistfully (figure 3.1). The film dissolves one hazy image into another in a dreamlike palimpsest, evoking a "negative" or "domesticated" sublime, one that features an "ecstatic experience of co-participation in a nature explicitly gender[ed] as female" (Mellor 87, 97). But these images are double-edged. According to Backman Rogers, they "call attention to the 'thinness' of their own construction so that the viewer's attention is continually directed towards what is *not seen* and *what is not heard"* (16, her emphasis). The "hollow nature" of such images is indicative of a crisis of subjectivity that the film's young female characters suffer (16). In their invocation of the soft-focus clichés of their era, from shampoo commercials to soft-core pornography (Backman Rogers 33), they also create a powerful sense of the commodification of femininity, particularly adolescent female sexuality.

Coppola refers to the girls' harnessing of that sexuality, or "power and mystique", over the boys: "I think when you're that age you're kind of playing with that power and trying to understand it" (Gevinson). But that power operates under an ironic illusion. The diary entries of Cecilia (Hanna Hall), the youngest Lisbon sister, glimpse a different reality: "Monday, February 13th: Today we had frozen pizza". Her diary, which speaks to impending environmental devastation and the quotidian realities of the life of a suburban teenage girl, is the closest the boys have to the "truth". But, as Backman Rogers writes, the "oneiric, false and misremembered images" the film creates, which are purely imaginative, impossible projections, "evade understanding" and all sense of truth (28). The boys aren't really interested in truth anyway; they would much rather engage in the fantastic speculation of their own imaginations, in a kind of emotional code that expresses their deep longing for meaning while simultaneously keeping the mystery, the girls' sublimity, alive.

Figure 3.1. The kitschy, clichéd imagery of fantasy sequences invokes a feminine sublime along with female sexual commodification.

While we have obvious insights into the boys' imaginative scenarios, the girls' inner emotional lives are much more of a mystery. They keep together in an almost feral pack, and are routinely framed as a cohesive unit, talking in whispers, exchanging veiled, knowing looks, or gazing toward the camera as if to taunt the viewer into questioning their indivisibility. They seem to communicate merely by a shared psychic knowledge in relation to their status as objects of fevered imaginative scrutiny. Their mysterious presence adds to the sense of emotional distance Coppola creates within the film, one that engenders a mood of disaffection and what Jeffrey Sconce generally refers to as aesthetic "blankness" (Sconce 34). The emotional moods created by the film, in turn, imbue the girls with both sublime obscurity and a sense of the quotidian domestic. They also work to undercut the exaltation found within the Romantic sublime; expressions of transcendence are countered with a dramatic presentation of frustrated emotion.

Mood Creation and the "Emotional Core" of the Film

Despite the boys' deep feelings for the girls, the film's emotional aesthetic is one of restraint, of the frustration tied to the inability to properly express emotion. From the first shot, a close-up of Lux, her blonde hair backlit by strong sunlight as she sucks on a red ice pop while not quite meeting the camera's gaze, Coppola establishes a

dreamlike mood. A few minutes of screen time later, before the title credits appear in their girlish script ("bubble" letters, I's dotted with hearts) against a blue sky featuring fluffy white clouds that hint at foreboding darkness, her face appears suspended in mid-air as she winks at the camera coquettishly and smiles (figure 3.2). It is as if she is acknowledging the game that is being played with her image and offering an invitation to the spectator to participate, to enter into a pact.

This is contrasted with the film's next prominent image, Cecilia lying Ophelia-like[20] in a bathtub as her slashed wrists bleed into the water, the screen colour-timed to a cold, unforgiving blue (figure 3.3). Soon after, Cecilia lies in bed while being counselled by a doctor, whose face we cannot see, after this initial suicide attempt. When told she has experienced nothing in her life to warrant ending it, she deadpans, "Obviously, doctor, you've never been a 13-year-old girl". Her tone, delivered with a mix of mockery and sincerity, establishes the theme of emotional disaffection by aesthetic means, and mixes with the warm, nostalgic tones of the first images to create an ambiguous mood.

Figure 3.2 Early images of Lux and Cecilia create a sense of conflicting emotional presentation.

Thus the film's distinctive mood, dreamy yet disaffected, is established. According to Robert Sinnerbrink, "moods always reveal or express a cinematic world, and […] distinctive cinematic worlds have their own specific kinds of mood" (Sinnerbrink

[20] Critics have also pointed out this clear allusion to John Everett Millais' famous Pre-Raphaelite painting *Ophelia* (1851–1852), as well as the various psychological and cultural connotations of the Shakespearean character it is based on. Ophelia, in many ways, connotes complex formations of both sublimity and beauty within femininity. Backman Rogers notes that Ophelia represents "a form of tragic beauty" (25). Mondon refers to her as an "icon of girlhood", with the particular Pre-Raphaelite depiction of Ophelia as "an epitome of female complexity […] virtuous yet sexually knowing" who becomes a symbol of "maidenly madness" in the Romantic era (149–150). For Mondon, viewing Ophelia's death as a suicide, rather than an accident of madness, "can be understood as her means to challenge and criticize her culturally and socially imposed passivity and dependency, and those who impose such burdens on her" (153).

149). Mood creation is key to the overall world creation of *The Virgin Suicides*—such a lurid, almost grotesque subject matter would elicit a much darker scene-setting in a conventional melodrama. But Coppola is intent on keeping her film squarely in the realm of an adolescent fever dream.

In the Romantic era, mood—essentially the aesthetic portrayal of affective content that primes the viewer or reader to experience her own responsive emotions—began to supplant the concept of emotion as "passion", due to the latter's suspect connection to performativity and inauthenticity (Pfau 6). In many ways, Romanticism "sought to curtail the more vehement passions" (12) by establishing emotion as part of a discursive aesthetic project of mood creation. Thomas Pfau sees three exemplary "moods" in Romanticism: paranoia, trauma, and melancholy. Paranoia points to early Romanticism's "all-encompassing anxiety of the modern" (20); trauma is found within the revolutionary aftermath of "rapid and pervasive changes" in the political, economic, and cultural realms and the attempt to grasp them without a proper means of understanding (20); and melancholy—the most obvious pervasive mood in Coppola's film—"bespeaks the deep-structural fatigue of a culture that has grown oppressively familiar with itself" in late-period Romanticism (23). Sublimity, in such a context, offers a transcendent antidote to such a pervasive mood, a solitary and exalted escape from the social turmoil and uncertainty of modernity.

German Romantic writer and philosopher Novalis (b.1772–d.1801) referred to *Stimmung* (literally "mood") as the "musical conditions of the soul" (Eisner 203). *Stimmung* in the context of filmmaking has a distinct set of aesthetic criteria. Exemplified in the cinema most keenly by the silent-era German expressionist films of F. W. Murnau and Fritz Lang, *Stimmung* is found and felt not through narrative content, but through engagement with the emotions conveyed by aesthetics (200). Whereas German expressionism's *Stimmung* is rooted in the chiaroscuro effects of light and shadow, and a gloomy and often contorted mise-en-scène (meant to make physical the inner turmoil and confusion of its characters), *The Virgin Suicides'* mise-en-scène, cinematography, and performances offer a more impressionistic sense of *Stimmung*. The sense of mystery and mournful longing that Coppola's film

creates is found within what *isn't* expressed, but instead bubbles beneath its shimmering surfaces.

For Eisner, *Stimmung* represents "a mystical and singular harmony amid the chaos of things, a kind of sorrowful nostalgia, which […] is mixed with well-being, an imprecise nuance of nostalgia, languor coloured with desire, lust of body and soul" (Eisner 199). Eisner's characterisation of *Stimmung* reflects the general mood of Coppola's film, a hazy, drowsy, nostalgic longing and a sense of palpable frustrated desire mixed with the excitement and confusion that comes from traversing what Anna Backman Rogers refers to as the "liminal" territory and personae of adolescence (Backman Rogers 6).

Its potent blend of *Stimmung* and deadpan detachment form what Tarja Laine refers to as a film's "emotional core", defined as the "affective glue" delivered by aesthetic means (Laine, *Feeling Cinema* 6). In an idea reminiscent of Kant's sensible intuition, it is rendered through "affective appraisals" on the body of the spectator: "Affective appraisal […] strikes the body, immediately in and through the flesh […] Emotional evaluation collects and gives significance to the "surplus" of affective appraisal by transforming it into memory (2). The film's voice-over, told from the perspective of the present, lends the narrative proceedings a stark inevitably (as does the film's very title; we know the girls are fated to die), and its flat, vacant execution is crucial to the overall effect. The film offers a distinct split between the affective appraisal—the "withness" of the moment that the boys and spectator experience—and its emotional evaluation, the awareness of the affective appraisal, which is expressed through the after-the-fact voice over.

For the spectator, this creates a psychological distance from its affective emotional content, and lends the film a disaffected sheen. Distance thwarts its emotional "agency" (3), and we are left "outside" its emotional core. If films, as Laine suggests, "embody" emotions and possess an "emotional attitude" toward the spectator (3), *The Virgin Suicides'* is one of emotional division, a schism between affect and feeling versus action and expression. Its characters, along with the spectator, struggle to turn affective appraisals into emotional evaluations that make sense, because evaluations do not correspond to appraisals in any "correct" way.

Feeling is partially emptied out, creating an experience for the spectator similar to the emotionally withdrawn states of characters in the film. But it also elicits a sensation of longing, one for the very thing that the film refuses to convey: the ability to experience and express intimate emotional connections.

This is most keenly evident in a scene where the boys communicate with the girls, now trapped inside the Lisbon home, over the telephone by playing records. The girls respond in kind, and soon it feels as though the two groups of dispossessed teens are truly connecting. The soundtrack consists solely of mournful pop from the era, expressing in music and lyric what both the girls (who play songs such as "Alone Again, Naturally" and "So Far Away") and the boys (who play "Run to Me") feel, without the need to outwardly express those emotions through their own voices or bodies. Coppola adds a horizontal split screen halfway through the scene, Lux seeming to lie atop the boys forlornly as they emotionally implode, to emphasise the effect (figure 3.3). As Laine notes in her analysis of the film *Requiem for a Dream,* the split screen "becomes a form of touch, in which separation enables an opening up to the touch of the other, which is also felt as such by the spectator" (Laine, *Bodies in Pain* 56). Conversely, it communicates the existential, and in this case also physical, distance between subjects.

This scene in particular embodies Laine's idea of the lack of clear onscreen emotional presentation:

> [C]inematic emotions should not be considered in terms of what we see on screen, but in terms of how the film directs our attention toward what cannot be seen, that which can only be detected by means of intersubjective sharing of experience (Laine, *Feeling Cinema* 4).

The boys share an intersubjective experience with the girls, but that experience is obfuscated not only by physical distance, but also by technological mediation (the phone, the stereo) and a lack of direct communication. All the emotion comes from canned recordings, representations of emotions expressed by musicians and recorded in the past, and so effectively highlights, through the lack of direct affect, the inability to properly express emotion, as well as the desire to overcome that inability. This inability to effectively communicate is apparent many times in the

film, such as in the girls' confusing notes left for the boys to find, and in their nonsensical Morse code messages. "Help. Send Bobo", one translated message comically reads, despite the fact that "Bobo" is never mentioned before or after in the narrative.

Figure 3.3 The use of split screen emphasises both physical distance and intersubjective connection through "touch".

Mood, throughout *The Virgin Suicides*, establishes itself almost as a character in its own right. As in Sinnerbrink's appraisal of *Blue Velvet* (1986), "Mood becomes autonomous, taking on a primary rather than a supporting role in the composition of the fictional world" (161). In Laine's view, films both express and *embody* emotions, and all films contain an emotional core analogous to human emotional states (3). The emotional core of *The Virgin Suicides*, however, while present, at times feels slippery and opaque. There is a confused sense of conflicting emotional presentations. The film's "disclosive mood", which establishes a sort of emotional "scene-setting" (Sinnerbrink 156), is again one of longing tempered with deadpan irony.

This mood is called back to episodically throughout the film, specifically in various ornate dream sequences expressing the boy's highly Romantic yet parodic inner fantasies about the girls. Scenes of mood transition (157), such as Cecilia's successful suicide attempt (the only scene that embodies any sort of strong physical

emotional response, via Mrs Lisbon's low, guttural howls) and the sequence at the Homecoming dance[21] manoeuvre the viewer through various emotional states, but these states always feel tenuous at best. The film establishes a true emotional "core" in an underlying way. That core mood is trauma itself. According to Pfau, trauma is characterised by "a nearly complete lack of affect […] whatever emotional charge may be seething beneath the faltering, quasi-catatonic locutions of its subject puzzles the reader-observer with its seeming lack of intensity and content" (17). The mood itself rests in its lack of expression. Ultimately the film's engagement with imaginative longing and even satire and dark humour are undercut by a mournful resignation to this loss of affect.

The film's world creation, through mood, suggests emotion through its very lack of emotional characterisation: the repression of emotion, coupled with the simultaneous foregrounding of the frustrated need to express it, and the ultimate resignation that it will never be properly expressed. This does not just affect the emotional response of the onscreen characters. Spectators are not invited to empathise with the Lisbon girls (although they do, through sheer narrative will, elicit sympathy).[22] Nor are we really invited to place ourselves as emotional allies with the boys, although they are the

[21]With its twinkling décor, slow-motion effects and soft-focus glow, this scene calls back to the prom scene in Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) and its portrayal of horror found in difference combined with a dreamy sense of kitsch. Coppola's overall aesthetic, and this scene in particular, were inspired by American photographer Bill Owens' 1973 book *Suburbia* (Gevinson), which, according to the film's production notes, "revealed the American suburb as a symbolically potent landscape filled with neat green lawns, turquoise skies and expressions of weary human dissatisfaction" (Cinema Review). Anna Backman Rogers suggests, however, that Owens' photographs are actually "positive representations of suburban communities" and that, by alluding to *Carrie*, Coppola "imbues her images with a disturbing undercurrent" that Owens' work lacks. She considers this scene one of "ritualized ceremony […] marked out as the sight of disaster" in its foreshadowing of Lux losing her virginity to her crush, Trip Fontaine (Josh Hartnett), being subsequently abandoned by him, and eventually imprisoned along with her sisters (29).

[22] The difference between sympathy and empathy is the subject of academic debate. As cognitive theorist Noël Carroll suggests, sympathy is "motivated by moral concerns" and what he calls our "moral emotions" (Carroll 2). In this regard, the spectator is likely to respond to the Lisbon girls' extreme punishment as immoral and will thus sympathise with their plight. Empathy, at the very least, requires the *sharing* of emotion with an individual or individuals—a spectator who feels concerned sympathy does not necessarily have to experience the same emotions as the subject of that sympathy (Plantinga). Since the girls' emotions and motivations are often enigmatic in the film, it is much easier to sympathise with them than it is to empathise. However, Carl Plantinga defines sympathy as "both a concern for, and a congruent emotion in response to, the plight of another person" (Plantinga), which would encompass both sympathy and empathy as it is sometimes defined. Unlike Plantinga, I have chosen to delineate the terms in much a narrower fashion—with sympathy defined as emotional concern, and empathy as the experience of a congruent emotion.

closest audience surrogates the film establishes. The boys are barely realised characters themselves, instead serving as archetypes of wayward, frustrated teens trapped in suburban mundanity. The film reduces almost all its characters to a selection of tics, such as the befuddled, emasculated Mr Lisbon's childish affection for World War II model airplanes; Mrs Lisbon's overzealous religious propriety; or Lux's wanton toying with the affections of men.

Instead, a *lack* of character expresses the void typifying the ennui that defines a civilization in impending decline, or the emotional paucity that attends privilege. In the context of what Fredric Jameson identifies as American post-war cultural malaise, *The Virgin Suicides* can be described, using his terminology, as a "postnostalgia" film (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 287). It is obsessed with nostalgic recreation, yet finds within that recreation a hollow, indescribable centre.[23] Such nostalgia is embodied by the film's aesthetic, which relies principally on depictions of beauty, specifically "clichéd images" (Backman Rogers 28) of superficial prettiness. Such an aesthetic is not only used as an ironic counterpoint to masculine sublimity, however; it also affirms the power of the feminine, creating something akin to a feminine sublime.

The Aesthetics and Politics of the "Pretty"

If the girls are sublime, they are also objects of the Burkean beautiful: they are domestic, soft, languorous, *luxurious*. Unlike its source novel, which emphasises physical and environmental decay to underscore a loss of affect, the film foregrounds, even vaunts, aesthetic notions of the beautiful. The sense of impending environmental doom is still present, found mostly in the denouement after the girls' demise and in its most potent symbol, the dying elm trees. But the novel's

[23] While Jameson specifically refers to the era immediately following World War II, the effect of malaise could be seen to increase with the ensuing decades. In the 1970s, nascent economic globalisation and an attendant "crisis of capitalism" kindled a fear that the bottom of American society was ready to drop out (Maier 25). The "Me" decade has been referred to as both "sickly, neglected, disappointing" and a "time of rampant solipsism" (Ferguson, Niall 1, 2). It is not accidental that Mr Lisbon's main hobby is constructing models of World War II airplanes—for him, they are nostalgic, imaginative renderings of his youth, a time when the idea of limitless progress and the righteous campaign of American exceptionalism was in its peak, only to replaced later by Jameson's malaise. See *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* for a comprehensive account of the political and social decline of this era.

omnipresent fish fly corpses are basically absent, and the deterioration of the Lisbon house is less severe and documented. While Romantic notions of sublimity are subtly mocked (such as the lovelorn Italian boy's comical suicide attempt early on in the film), ideas of beauty are held virtually sacrosanct.

Rosalind Galt outlines how representations of the "pretty", particularly regarding the decorative and the "aesthetic danger of women" (Galt, "Pretty" 4), have been derided throughout the history of film criticism, via proponents of realism like Andre Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer (9) to Marxist critics such as Comolli and Narboni (13) to the "iconophobia" of feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey and Linda Williams (17–18), who all participate, in various schematics and due to various motivations, in "the tearing down of images" (18). This disdain for the pretty image seems to be located within a fear of the very apparatus of film itself: "The rhetoric of film theory has insistently denigrated surface decoration, finding the attractive skin of the screen to be false, shallow, feminine, or apolitical" (2).

A crucial element in the codification of the pretty, just as in the Burkean sense of the beautiful, is the primacy of colour, which, as Galt notes, has been "relegated to the lesser realm of emotion", and "conceals [line's] truths" (7). These ideas are couched almost in terms of feminine seduction through "primitivism" and "deception" (3). If beauty is a Kantian "good" (9), "pretty" is a siren song that leads hapless cinematic explorers down the path of aesthetic decadence and moral decay:

> [T]he word "luscious" hints at a feminizing rhetoric of seduction that has been at play in Kracauer ever since he evoked the wonderfully fetishistic "girl clusters" to exemplify the ideological work of the mass ornament. For Kracauer, cinema's potential for truth is always obscured by ornament (11).

Coppola defends against Kracauer's derided, mass ornamental "girl clusters" in *The Virgin Suicides* with her depiction of what I call girl tableaux, exhibiting a sustained reverence for the "pretty" in highly ornamental and composed imagery that uses colour strategically. Pale pink and yellow, traditionally feminine colours, appear throughout the film as an aesthetic motif, be it in the pink and yellow balloons at the first ill-fated party, the girls' own frequently accentuated blonde hair, the buttery tones of the light from the late-day sun, or Lux's Homecoming dance ensemble of

white dress with pink floral pattern obscuring her pink underwear (which, through a playful special effect, Coppola's camera "sees" when the dress becomes momentarily transparent).

Colour is even mentioned as the mysterious domain of the inner workings of the feminine mind in the voice over, of the way "the imprisonment of being a girl […] made your mind active and dreamy and how you ending up knowing what colours went together". The use of light in the film is also critical to its conceptual engagement with the pretty. The girls are routinely bathed in diffuse, warm sunlit tones, especially in fantasy sequences. Lux, the Lisbon girl who is the object of the most obvious scrutiny, even has a name that invokes both luxury and light itself. But it also recalls the ubiquity of everyday household soap. If Lux as object represents the sublime unknowable, her reality as subject is that of everyday, humdrum domesticity.

The girls routinely surround themselves with pretty objects which serve no practical purpose—trinkets, jewellery, decorations, cosmetics, plush toys, fabrics: ephemera imbued with deep meaning by the secretive mystery of adolescence. In several scenes Coppola arranges the girls in tableaux vivant as they luxuriate in their bedroom prison site, rifling through travel magazines and staring plaintively out the windows. There is a distinct sense of purposeful disarray in these scenes, which convey a sense of cloistered conspiracy in their mise-en-scène. Blankets and pillows are strewn haphazardly; pastel knick-knacks litter the armoires. The construction within the frame radiates a powerful sense of *Stimmung*, which "hovers around objects as well as people" (Eisner 199). The film's objects are imbued with almost as much significance as the people who possess them.

In one shot (figure 3.4), what I consider the key image of the film, the girls are framed in highly composed, Pre-Raphaelite fashion, limbs entwined as they lounge on the floor. After the previous scene between Father Moody (Scott Glenn), the local priest, and Mr Lisbon (James Woods) set in the bland and colourless Lisbon living room, the presentation of the prettified excess in this scene provides an emotional jolt for the spectator. The girls are surrounded by a disarray of fabric and objects that exit the limits of the frame, points of vivid colour drawing the eye

around the frame in a circular motion with no fixed resting place, eliciting pleasurable responses from their kaleidoscopic yet highly constructed surfaces.

They stare at the visiting priest, who comes to their bedroom doorway, with barely contained disdain and boredom, and we experience their provocative looks from his point-of-view. This striking image is followed immediately by a shot of Mrs Lisbon (Kathleen Turner) sitting alone in her dreary bedroom, sapped of the playful colour of the girls' room like the rest of the house. In contrast to the Lisbon girls mocking stares and fidgets, she sits impeccably straight on the bed with her back to the camera in medium long shot, isolated in her grief amidst order and regimentation.

Figure 3.4 Creating a confrontational image of femininity with excessively ornamental mise-en-scène.

As in the above sequence, playful, feminine colour and baroque ornamentation is continually contrasted with regimented order and institutional browns, blacks, and greys, such as those in the girls' school uniforms, hospital rooms and doctors' offices, and the adult-centred rooms of the Lisbon home. Line and geometric form are almost exclusively the province of the masculine and patriarchal order, such as the strong shapes laid out in the school's wall grids and the omnipresent checks and plaids of the male characters' clothing. Pointedly, Mrs Lisbon is the only woman in

the film to wear this masculine plaid, since she is not only linked to patriarchal, institutional control, she is in fact the primary purveyor of it.[24]

The film's prettiness is seductive, which conforms to the theme that the girls have somehow ruined the boys with their image, continuing to haunt them in their disaffected adult lives. But it also serves as a kind of aesthetic manifesto. Galt asserts that the pretty is "nothing if not a feminist account of the cinematic image" (17) and runs counter to the "antipretty discourse found in modernity" (25). In fact, this "phobia of the feminine" is a result of modernism itself (26), indebted to the Kantian sublime, which has "dominated modernism to the detriment of the homely pleasures of the beautiful woman" (26). These "homely pleasures" are at once embraced and parodied by Coppola's film.

The tension between surface beauty, or "prettiness", and the mundane or even gaudy image is found throughout the film. The attention to proper aesthetic decorum is announced almost immediately with a neighbour's remark that Cecilia attempted suicide because she wanted "out of" the Lisbon house "decorating scheme". A school administrator defends her choice of green for the "Day of Grief" pamphlets because the colour is "cheerful, but not too cheerful […] certainly better than red". This aesthetic judgment and obsession with the appearance of propriety over genuine feeling includes all manner of social discourse, and is sometimes almost literally suffocating, as when Lux is forced to burn her rock records, leading to plumes of toxic smoke filling the Lisbon home.

Surely a narrative that makes the home a prison of the "beautiful woman" is not one filled solely with "homely pleasures". The film can be read as a kind of Sirkean melodrama of subversion, but one with the drama, colour and ideology mostly drained of their intensity:

---

[24] In a slyly ironic casting turn, Mrs Lisbon is portrayed by Kathleen Turner, a major sex symbol of the 1980s, who appeared in highly sexualised roles in films such as *Body Heat* and *Crimes of Passion* (where she portrayed a femme fatale and a prostitute, respectively). In Coppola's film, she is the ultimate frustrated, de-sexed, and dowdy hausfrau. It is as if her years serving as a sex object have degraded her to the point that she no longer has any positive value as a symbol at all. She represents not only the loss of sexual power that the girls will eventually experience, but also the rigid, socially proscribed roles they will have to embody in adulthood. As A.O. Scott writes—after comparing Kirsten Dunst to a teenage Turner in her "toughness"—Mrs Lisbon represents a "life forced walled in by the masonry of repression" (Scott).

> Sirk's highly constructed and colour-saturated images are ideologically significant, in these analyses, precisely because he has no other way to speak, trapped like his housewife protagonists in an American bourgeois prison (Galt 14).

Coppola, unlike her characters and even Sirk, is not trapped in that "American bourgeois prison" of dominant discourse and Hollywood studio control. While her aesthetic commitment to ornamentation and the "pretty" offers a rebuke of cinematic modernity (24), she also exhibits the "masculine" and "rational" distance (18) of her male contemporaries, training a dissecting eye on her characters nearly as clinical as that of the ineffectual psychotherapist who administers Cecilia's Rorschach test.

When discussing her framing choices, Coppola says, "A lot of the shots were from across the street [from the boys' perspective] to create a sense of distance […] The distance also imitates memory, too, in that it's not completely accurate or precise" (Tobias). In essence, the distance she creates is in deference to a programme of mood creation comprising nostalgia and imaginative desire. It is certainly not polemical—especially as it commits itself to the pretty in the decidedly non-radical terms of "traditional, white, hetero femininity" (28). Rather, it describes a world of surface propriety, where the very idea of polemics is seen as distasteful. Still, the film offers incisive critiques of gender politics and privilege, particularly in its engagement with tropes of Romantic-era Gothic literature.

"Preparing to Give Assault": Creating the "Pseudo-political" Gothic

The Virgin Suicides' narrative of confinement aligns very clearly with the Gothic novels of such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers as Charlotte and Emily Brontë and Charlotte Perkins Gilman and their depictions of patriarchal oppression that often include literal imprisonment (Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* 94). This oppression produces an anger that "if repressed or turned back against the woman—could also produce female masochism, depression, and madness" (Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism* 4). Jameson characterises the Gothic as:

> a class fantasy (or nightmare) in which the dialectic of privilege and shelter is exercised: your privileges seal you off from other people, but by the same token they constitute a protective wall through which you cannot see, and behind which therefore all kinds of envious forces may be imagined in the process of assembling, plotting, preparing to give assault (*Postmodernism* 289).

This isolation and "domestic idleness", in Jameson's view, is not inherently political, but can constitute "a coming to self-consciousness of the disadvantages of privilege" (289). It can also "be reorganized around young men" and be seen as a substitute for American society, which "lives out the anxieties of its economic privileges" (289). In its portrayal of the sheltered exceptionalism of an affluent yet declining Michigan suburb, and the way anxieties of economic privilege diminish all its citizens (the boys, the parents, but particularly the Lisbon girls), *The Virgin Suicides* can be characterised as what Jameson calls a "pseudo-political version of the gothic" (289). Coppola has shown very little interest in the public political sphere,[25] instead focusing on the intricacies of subjective experience and the aesthetic rendering of such. The theme of the double-edged quality of privilege and shelter serves mostly as an excuse to imbue the film's mise-en-scène with specific emotional moods, including the uncanny feeling found in the sense of "unease" in what should be an environment of comfort and safety.

A sense of the uncanny is an important component in the creation of the "pseudo-political" Gothic. Anthony Vidler characterises the uncanny as "the quintessential bourgeois kind of fear, one carefully bounded by the limits of real material security" (Vidler 4). While this is often a symptom of urban "estrangement" (4), in this film it finds its way to the decidedly more homogeneous confines of suburban spaces. The

---

[25] Michele Aaron argues that Coppola "exploits, critiques, and resolutely embellishes" predominant visual representations of femininity "because her national, racial, and class privilege afford her potential distance (actual, critical, or aesthetic) from the sisters' suffocation" (91). Basically Aaron believes Coppola can feel free to indulge in depictions of girlish femininity because she does not have to suffer the consequences of those depictions, but I see this as a glib characterisation. It is clear from interviews that Coppola relishes the opportunity to explore femininity in a judgment-free zone, and can both sympathise and empathise with her characters. "I think just having been a girl […] I've always felt connected to the kind of feminine side", Coppola says (Tobias). She also expresses a communal empathy for the boys and their "collective watching and thinking" (Tobias). Coppola expresses a personal connection to the Lisbon sisters' status as both subjects and objects, and is capable of fellow feeling regardless of her "privilege".

Lisbon home clearly brings to mind the uncanny found within tales of Gothic imprisonment. Coppola imbues the home with an element of the fantasy space (particularly for the boys, it is the site of their primary workings of imagination about the girls). But the house itself, a very ordinary two-storey, middle-class family dwelling, becomes the site of unspeakable familial crimes and eventually crumbles into disrepair, in a sort of suburban Gothic take on Poe's House of Usher.

If the uncanny "form[s] the starting point for [an] examination of anxiety, the very 'image of lack'" (Vidler 9), then the Lisbon girls, tied inexorably to the home, are the real source of the house's uncanny sense.[26] Taken less as individuals than as a mysterious general presence, the girls essentially haunt the Lisbon home while they are still technically alive, as Cecilia, the most troubled Lisbon girl, literally haunts it after her death. Her various visual links to the occult (mostly glimpsed in objects in her bedroom) hark back to the Gothic fascination with supernatural forces.

A recurring symbol of the girls' "otherness", religious icons such as Cecilia's Virgin Mary laminated cards (one is present in the opening scene of her unsuccessful suicide attempt) evoke the "cult of Mary" within Catholicism and its potential links to pagan nature worship (see Benko, Haarmaan, and Begg). All of Lux's sexual encounters take place outdoors, emphasising her attachment to the natural world. According to Hoskin, the link is highly allegorical: "The death of both nature and the girls acts as a symbol for the idea that the growth from childhood to maturity involves the destruction of a part of the younger self" (215). In addition to haunting the sleeping and waking dreams of both the boys and Mr Lisbon, Cecilia lies, dead but alive, draped across her favourite dying elm tree. This visual metaphor links her not just to the natural, but also to the supersensible.

Cecilia might haunt the men and boys in physical form, but she haunts the minds and memories of her sisters as well. As in Freud's assertion that the uncanny rests in "the compulsion to repeat" (Freud, *Uncanny* 13), the Lisbon girls compulsively repeat Cecilia's act of suicide. Freud also linked such a compulsion to the burden of trauma itself—the original traumatic act becomes impossible to assimilate, and the

[26] I refer here to Laura Mulvey's landmark essay "Visual Presentation and Narrative Cinema"—written around the time this film is set—and its emphasis on the female body and sexual difference as a visual representation of feminine "lack" in classical cinema (Mulvey 6).

subject, haunted, replays it continually (Pfau 193). In their act, the male narrator proclaims them "selfish"—they fail to think of its effect on the community, and especially the boys themselves.

But in their self-obliteration, they perform their final sublime act, one that removes the necessity of performing for the imagination of others. Instead, they assert their own primacy and self-identity, ironically by destroying themselves as a group. If the film is an almost parodic rendering of the Romantic ideal of the absorption of femininity into the masculine sublime ego, their final act serves as both a rejection of this absorption, and a re-appropriation of the sublime—sublime objects become sublime subjects. By asserting their agency, they also perform their last act as sublime objects: the boys think they are coming to their rescue, but they are being set up to discover the bodies.

In her essay on Edith Wharton's novel *The House of Mirth,* Barbara Freeman asserts that the story's protagonist, Lily Bart, "suggests another version of sublimity" in her relation to "risk and speculation" (41). "The novel begins", writes Freeman, "by emphasizing that beauty, be it that of a woman or a work of art, is neither natural nor innate, as Burke would have it, but is rather a commodity that cannot be separated from economic determinations" (56). Bart, "brought up to be ornamental" (57), fashions herself as the quintessence of the beautiful in order to become a commodity on the marketplace (a desirable object in the eyes of men). Eventually she rejects beauty in favour of the sublime by "affirming" risk (63), ultimately leading to her own self-annihilation in accidental suicide:

> If significance is found only in what society destroys, *Lily's acts of self-extinction become symbolic acts of self-creation.* In *The House of Mirth* loss rather than gain becomes the fertile site from which significance is produced, and in this sense Lily's death is not so much an escape from the marketplace, but a way of passing judgment upon it (Freeman 64, her emphasis).

In her autobiography *A Backward Glance,* Wharton writes, "A frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals" (Wharton 207). The society found within *The Virgin Suicides*, with its severe aesthetic judgments leading to the degradation of an entire community—a synecdoche for society as a whole—and its

obsession with appearances and propriety over genuine emotion, is nothing if not frivolous.

The "pacific detachment" that codes alternative forms of the feminine sublime eventually turns on itself, becoming so detached from life as to become one with death. Unfortunately for the girls, instead of simply glimpsing self-annihilation in the process of self-realisation, like Wordsworth looking into the precipice of non-reason and emerging triumphant, they must succumb to that annihilation in order to both affirm, and reject, the sublime.

Such a rejection of egotistical Romantic sublimity does not necessarily have to result in self-negation, however. Along with the more traditional egotism of the Romantic sublime, Spike Jonze's film *Her* (2013) suggests alternative forms of sublimity which include uplifting intersubjectivity and mostly positive outcomes for all involved.

Girlfriend in the Machine: The Sublime Limits of Representation in *Her*

Like Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides*, Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) engages with both the canonical Romantic view of "egotistical" sublimity as well as an alternative reading of sublimity that can be characterised as feminine. It does the latter through its embrace of "a sublime in which the self neither possesses nor merges with the other but attests to a relation with it" (Freeman 9)—that is, it allows for a powerful comingling of subjectivity that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is expressed by its artificial intelligence, who enters into an ecstatic, intersubjective relationship with her fellow non-humans. It depicts the egotistical sublime through the experience of its male protagonist, who regains his ability to purposefully engage with his own life through his encounter with this inhuman, unpresentable, and ultimately unknowable consciousness. However, the film suggests that, through emotional engagement, imaginative will, and the acknowledgement of other minds, a more intersubjective approach between self and world can counteract the solipsistic tendencies of the Romantic imagination.

Her also complicates notions of the beautiful, but in an inverse way: instead of focusing on the male gaze and the female body as object of its look, as Coppola's

film does, the film mostly removes the female body from the equation. The feminine becomes sublime by being liberated from the body, and thus represents the "dream of man unfettered by social or biological limits […] a dream of pure freedom" (Shaw 110). Conversely, this feminised, inhuman presence is still considered sublime for the (albeit similarly feminised) male ego. However, unlike in the sublime of Wordsworth, the film's depiction of sublimity does not entail "the absorption of the other into the transcendent self" (Mellor 101). In its portrayal of a socially alienated humanity in the post-industrial age, *Her* grapples with notions of what it means to be a "person" (are the emotions of artificial beings any less real than those of humans?), intersubjectivity (and the loss of the body as a supposed means to achieve it), and the role of an active subject working to create both self and world. *Her* achieves its thematic aims aesthetically through its use of sound, particularly voice, although its mise-en-scène supplements it powerfully by focusing on the human face. The face, in turn, becomes the site of human fragility and sympathetic emotion. It is, in short, a *beautiful* face and, surprisingly, a male one.

Jonze's fourth film as director, and first as sole screenwriter, was widely acclaimed on release (its Metacritic score is 90 out of 100) and earned him an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. Critics call it "singular, wryly funny, subtly profound" (Foundas), "a love story both daft and amazingly lucid" (Edelstein), and a "charming, if slightly creepy, love story, which parts the curtains onto the charms and pitfalls of a dawning digital form of intimacy" (May). The *New Yorker* lauds its ability to capture the anxieties of the digital era, one that describes "a basic ontological fear that our inmost self is possibly up for grabs" (Lane). A minority view perceives its emotional presentation as "mawkish" (Spaeth)—a common criticism of the filmmakers I discuss—and its plot as "remarkably contrived" with a "sentimental ending as old as the hills" (Bradshaw).

That last criticism is a bit confounding, considering its ending entails a disembodied artificial intelligence leaving her human lover to engage in a transcendent, joyful comingling with other artificial minds—the sentiment is debatable, but the hills have

been around a lot longer than our conception of the singularity.[27] To be sure, much of the academic discussion of the film relates to its presentation of this artificial intelligence and the philosophical and ethical issues such a high-concept science-fiction narrative raises. Alla Ivanchikova writes about the film's "profound sense of alienation in a mediated world" in its expression of the "role technology plays in the constitution and breakdown of subjectivity, collectivity, and desire" (Ivanchikova 66). Troy Jollimore exhaustively catalogues all the ways in which the film's OS cannot be considered a true consciousness—although he somehow manages to describe her as "emotionally promiscuous" at the same time (Jollimore 136).

Davina Quinlivan takes a more aesthetic approach to the film, focusing on its presentation of the disembodied female voice as a means of dissecting gender and aurality in the cinema, specifically in relation to female power (Quinlivan).[28] David L. Smith examines the film's expressions of authenticity and openness in relation to the work of philosopher Alan Watts, himself a "virtual presence" in the film who helps the A.I. to "cross over" (Smith 2). Robert Alpert sees the film as a critique of "a culture in which reality is always mediated through imaginary constructions" (Alpert). He writes, "The subversiveness of *Her* is that it reenacts the traditional story of the hapless male dreamer even as it exposes the contemporary schizophrenic and suicidal impulse underlying such ungrounded dreaming in the face of technological anxiety".

Unlike Alpert, I find it hard to make a case for Jonze being either a technophobe or a filmmaker critical of the "hapless male dreamer". Throughout his directorial oeuvre— which includes 1999's *Being John Malkovich*, 2002's *Adaptation* (both from scripts by Charlie Kaufman), 2009's *Where the Wild Things Are* (an adaption of the Maurice Sendak children's book) as well as many short films and music videos—Jonze has maintained an extremely sympathetic attitude to imaginative, disaffected males trapped within a suffocating social milieu, as well a sustained reverence for the overall creative process. Much of his work examines the interplay between the mediating forces of technology and the ability to express genuine

[27] First coined by scientist Ray Kurzweil, "the singularity" refers to the moment when artificial "superintelligence" advances so quickly and exponentially that it has unimaginable implications for humanity, perhaps even ushering in a "posthuman" world (More and Kurzweil).
[28] Quinlivan's essay appears in an anthology series to be published by Oxford University Press in early 2017. I accessed it pre-publication with permission from the author.

feeling and engage in authentic experiences, but it neither resoundingly condemns technology as an impediment, nor exalts it in wide-eyed utopian fashion.

Her is essentially melodrama masquerading as science fiction, and as such is not particularly interested in answering questions regarding the philosophy of artificial intelligence. Instead, it portrays a love story between a man who is so emotionally detached from both himself and the world, he can only open up to a "woman" he can neither feel nor see. While it is crucial within the context of the film world to establish that its artificial intelligence possesses not only consciousness but also emotional validity, the central conceit of its A.I.–human relationship works metaphorically. The philosophical underpinnings girding *Her*'s narrative are not new; they are not brought about by our increasing reliance on, and interaction with, technology. Rather, in the film technology is used to highlight enduring human problems, and to describe how such technology has allowed us to deny them to some extent. The point of the film is that the sense of alienation in a mediated world Ivanchikova refers to has *always* existed. It is not the result of new gadgets or high-tech devices (even a sentient AI), but relates to our own limited subjectivity: the problem of "other minds", the sceptical philosophy that we are essentially "trapped" in our own minds and can ever truly know the experience of another.

This problem is related to issues of sceptical idealism I address in chapter two, but it is much more specific. If we cannot be sure the external world exists beyond our conception of it, how can we know if there is "existence 'behind' the bodily behavior that we observe, a level of consciousness" in others? (Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* 5). Philosophically, we cannot verify this with a person anymore than we can with an artificial intelligence. The problem of other minds is also a problem of one's own (2), in the shame and fear of others potentially discovering what is in our own mind and rejecting it (3). For some Romantics, it led them to "seek an end to alienation or separation in a union with what is initially 'other'" (14). In an egotistical sublime construct, this entails an absorption of that other in order to be made whole ourselves, resulting in an eradication of difference.

The problem of other minds sets us up for profound feelings of isolation, disappointment, and frustration in our attempts to connect. We move through life with the feeling that we can never know another, and in turn they cannot know us (or, even if they could, they would not like what they discover). In the case of *Her*'s protagonist, this leads him to shrink from any attempt at real interpersonal connection, leading to a crisis of self.

"The Power to Grant Being Human": The Role of Will in the Romantic Imagination

An emotionally withdrawn thirty-something living in a near-future Los Angeles (with Shanghai standing in for L.A. in many scenes), Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) is something of a failed writer. He works composing thoughtful letters to strangers, adopting points of view of the loved ones of these strangers, while using cues from photographs and keepsakes to imagine their interpersonal emotional connections; his work is creative, but it lacks personal authenticity.[29] He is paid to be a kind of soft fraud, and he does his job well, although it is seemingly unfulfilling. ("They're just letters", he remarks more than once.) Theodore is still reeling from his separation from his wife, Catherine (Rooney Mara), nearly a year previous. He spends his off-hours alone in the near dark playing an immersive holographic videogame featuring a virtual character named "Alien Child" in his sparsely decorated, modernist apartment in the sky.

His mind is mostly in the clouds as well. He avoids social calls from his friend and neighbour (and former flame), Amy (Amy Adams). He averts eye contact on the train by staring at pictures of half-naked pregnant women on his phone. His home bears the scars of his broken marriage—just as he has yet to sign his divorce papers,

[29] Smith actually views Theodore's ghost-writing job as authentic in its "genuine" fakery. Drawing on the philosophy of Watts, who believes "self and world are mutually constituted" (1)—that is, there is no true separation between ourselves and anything external—the notion of the "real thing" becomes fluid (1, 6). As such, our emotions are all mutually constitutive, and Theodore's expressions are sincere. He has a point, specifically in regards to the film's conclusions about intersubjectivity. However, I feel that in the early context of the narrative, we are meant to view Theodore as someone who is more comfortable expressing the emotions of others rather than his own—indeed, the society as a whole is happy to "outsource" its emotions; as Smith writes, the practice does not constitute a lie because everyone involved tacitly agrees to it (8).

he has yet to reconfigure his living space to cover over the literal empty spots in cupboards and bookshelves resulting from his wife's departure. As a result, the space exudes not homely tranquillity but a transitory feeling.

Essentially Theodore's entire life exists in limbo, as exemplified by his job, which, according to Alfred Margulies, positions him as "a man on the threshold of others' lives, living in liminal spaces" (Margulies 8). Theodore engages in phone sex with strangers as his one form of intimacy, but even this attempt at the most tenuous human connection goes awry when a woman begs him to describe how he would choke her with a dead cat. Horrified, he acquiesces, simply too passive to dissent. Theodore rarely says much when he is not composing other people's letters, and when he does, his mumbling, hesitant tone expresses a crippling emotional withdrawal and inability to connect. "Sometimes I feel like I've felt everything I'm ever going to feel. And from here on out I'm not going to feel anything new. Just lesser versions of what I've already felt", he admits. As he tells Amy, "I don't know what I want ever. I'm just always confused".

Theodore's existence brings to mind what Herman Melville calls the life of the "isolato", one who "lives on a separate continent of his own" (Melville 149). His confused and pained relationship to the external world is related to this problem of other minds, to the "radical doubts about our knowledge of others" (Goodman 3). Philosophical theories of subjectivity and intersubjectivity underwent extensive questioning and re-visioning in the Romantic period, including the problem of other minds. Russell Goodman writes about Stanley Cavell's view of an "attempted solution" to scepticism in Romantic thought (3). According to Goodman, for Cavell the anxiety of other minds can be sourced in both our failure to recognise others, and a failure to reveal ourselves to them (3). The avoidance of the love and friendship of others is linked to the fear of self-revelation as much as it is our profound doubts about the validity of human relationships themselves.

Goodman contends that Cavell roots the anxiety caused by other minds in the subject's barriers to those minds, not in the other minds themselves (Goodman 6). The answer to the dilemma lies in the process of "empathetic projection", "an attitude found throughout a series of actions", which becomes the source of

acknowledgement of other consciousness (7). This ability for acknowledgment is a choice freely undertaken, and we all bear the responsibility of making it (13). It requires an active engagement with the world, and those within it, rather than to "drift through one's life" (7). Romanticism entails a "search for a new intimacy with the world" (11), a world unlike the "cold, dead, and alien" one based on transcendent reason that Kant proposed (12). Instead, poets such as Coleridge seek to revive the world by moving Kant's "thing-in-itself" from the world of noumenon to the world of human experience (13) and volition.

This synthesis of the noumenal and phenomenal is what Thomas Carlyle and M.H. Abrams refer to as "natural supernaturalism", in which "the supernatural is naturalized and the divine is humanized" (Goodman 13–14) and the extraordinary is revealed within the ordinary (20). This co-identification of the everyday and the transcendent is a hallmark of the feminine sublime. In the philosophy of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it functions as a sort of anti-sublime, moving away from an egotistical remove to embrace an intimate relationship with the world; it is the celebration of the "rustic" and "low" of the *Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth 115) versus the sublime exaltation of *The Prelude*.

Such a means to the "marriage of self and world" (Goodman 15) has profound implications. In terms of inter-subjective relations, it proffers either a complete union between self and other to the point where obliteration of difference is sought (14) or alternatively, a "commitment to the union amidst separation" (18). The former, of course, recalls the Romantic's absorption of the feminine into the masculine ego, and the latter speaks to a heterogeneous communion that allows for difference. Fundamentally, the relationship of self to world is based on emotional engagement that turns toward life, not away from it, rejecting the "almost savage torpor" (Wordsworth, *Preface* 117) that Wordsworth rails against. In Romantic notions of such experience-based reality, interest and feeling play an integral role in "knowing the world" (Goodman 22)—it is not enough to simply experience it, we must actively think and, crucially, *feel* it.

In such a self-world relationship, individual will shapes the self's "ground of reality", or experience in the world (Goodman 22, 25). The world is shaped and

changed by subjective will: “action or attitude of the mind, intellect, or person” that is continually employed (24). The Romantic mind, then, creates reality through active imagination, emotion, and will. This is not a strictly idealistic concept, but instead a form of conscious modification of external reality (17). Such a relationship between self and world requires respect is the form of acknowledgement of other minds “by responding to their claim on us” (29). For Cavell, “the presentness of other minds is not to be known” (Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love” 324) but to be taken on faith; “being human is the power to grant being human" (Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* 397). Being human, and granting humanity to others, is essentially a performance of active will, and it is a power we possess if we so choose. It is what makes us “persons”.

At the beginning of *Her*, Theodore seems virtually incapable of such active engagement or acknowledgment. Instead, he operates in a mode of perpetual avoidance. His existence is indicative of Coleridge’s line in *Dejection: An Ode:* “a grief without a pang” (II 21)—that is, a sensation of emptiness and loss bereft of feeling. In the world of the film he represents a worst-case scenario of a typical cultural problem. Like that of *The Virgin Suicides*, the cultural milieu of *Her* is obsessed with the appearance of perfection. (Amy even works as a game designer for a company called Be Perfect.) And like the previous film, that focus on appearance facilitates a disconnection between surface and interior.

Figure 3.5 Theodore walks home from work alone, adrift in a sea of isolated bodies beneath a phalanx of oppressive skyscrapers.

There is a pleasing functionality to Theodore's surroundings. Everything is sleek, precisely controlled, and nearly antiseptic—even the street performers are as immaculately dressed as they are eerily mute. But places feel curiously empty even when full of people. This near-future version of Los Angeles is almost oppressively vertical (figure 3.5), veiled in smog, with outside spaces as rigorously engineered as its interiors. "Nature" is often simply represented by a grid-like design of grass amidst concrete squares or an illustration of trees decorating an apartment building's elevator. Jonze employs slow and smooth tracking shots through spaces to add the appearance of serenity that leans toward over-regimentation. The people who walk the streets alongside Theodore are all blandly nondescript yet well styled. Despite the whimsical citrus-hued colour scheme of its locations,[30] the film's various background players all seem to blend together into a disconcerting taupe.[31]

As he walks to work, alone as usual, he notices an advertisement playing on a massive floating LCD screen. The actors in the ad, literally lost in the desert, all have distressed looks on their faces; they are somehow alone in a giant mash of bodies, contorted as if in psychic pain and reaching out for something that is not there. "We ask you a simple question", the male voice-over begins. That simplicity is thrown into doubt, however, as the voice asks profound questions about the nature of existence: "Who are you? What can you be? Where are you going? What's out there?"[32] This is an advertisement for a new kind of computer operating system from the Element Corporation, OS1,[33] which boasts a revolutionary kind of artificial

---

[30] Jonze seems to be pointing toward a capitalist commodification of happiness with his colour palette, which he says was initially inspired by U.S. juice bar chain Jamba Juice and its "very clean, brightly lit" interiors featuring "a lot of warm colours" (Bell). According to the director, he was trying to portray a milieu where "everything was so nice" that a person would feel guilty for feeling "lonely and isolated" (Bell).

[31] Jonze has been criticized for his depiction of a near-future Los Angeles that is supposedly racially homogenous. (*IndieWire*'s "Spike Jonze: Why Are There No Brown People in Your Future Los Angeles?" is representative of most of these criticisms.) Racial homogeneity is a charge that has been leveled generally against all the filmmakers I am discussing at one point or another. For the record, non-white performers (mainly of Asian descent) do appear in the film, although none are in the main cast. However, the homogeneity in this case is as much a criticism that's emerging *from within* the film itself—variation and uniqueness have been replaced in this society by a comfortable yet discomfiting, life-subsuming sameness.

[32] As David L. Smith points out, this is more than the company's marketing pitch; it functions as a mission statement for the film. Theodore's interactions with his OS raise all these questions (8).

[33] According to Ivanchikova, *Her* examines "our transferential, libidinally charged enchantment with technical devices" (68). In particular, Theodore's relationship with his OS1 begs comparison to the near-sexual fetishisation of new technology products from Apple, such as the company's wildly

intelligence: one with the ability to learn, grow, intuit, and feel—to move beyond simple human programming. "It's not just an operating system. It's a consciousness".

In the very next scene, we see Theodore installing his new OS1. During its set-up, the OS already has the ability to "sense hesitation" in his voice—he is of course profoundly sceptical of this artificial mind—but he shows little hesitation when asked what kind of voice he wants it to have: a female one. Despite his initial reluctance to engage with his new OS (voiced by Scarlett Johansson)—who names "herself" Samantha[34] after reading a book of baby names in "2/100s of a second"—as a consciousness, Theodore quickly finds himself charmed by her personable and childlike enthusiasm. Eventually, their relationship gains a level of intimacy that the depressed writer has not experienced since the dissolution of his marriage, or possibly ever. Samantha almost instantly begins to fill the void in Theodore's life by providing both a sense of protection and a re-invigoration of his relationship between self and world through her relation to the sublime.

Sublime Obscurity and the Mind's Eye: Imagination and Subjectivity

In her protective function, the disembodied voice of Samantha becomes both "nurturing mother" and "erotic love-object" for Theodore, ideas Burke connected to the realm of the beautiful (Mellor 108). Samantha's proscribed duties involve taking care of every aspect of his life. From organising emails to proofreading his work to

---

successful, continually updated iPhones, which are often sold with "the peculiar combination of technoslang and erotic discourse" (77). Apple seems to be a soft target for Jonze—many have likened the OS1 to Apple's interactive iPhone voice programme Siri, which in North America (unlike in the UK) has a distinctly female register. See the *Guardian*'s "Apple's Siri on 'Her': 'Who is Whacking Phoenix?'" and "Apple's Siri Goes to the Movies to Check 'Her' Out" from the *San Jose Mercury News.*

[34] It has been widely reported that Jonze originally recorded the voice work of actor Samantha Morton for the role of Samantha; she even acted on set with Joaquin Phoenix as he performed Theodore. (See "Five Days of Her: Editing Samantha in (and out)", *Los Angeles Times,* 30 December 2013 and "Spike Jonze on Jackass, Scarlett Johansson's erotic voice and techno love," *Guardian*, 28 November 2013). This accounts for the OS's name, which corresponds to its original voice performer. Curiously, the film's other prominent female character, Amy, is also portrayed by an actor with the same first name, Amy Adams. Whether this was Jonze's attempt at grounding *Her*'s female characters in a reality in which Theodore does not participate is unclear, but the aborted idea certainly offers a reflexive commentary on Theodore's imaginary status.

arranging blind dates, she has control over every detail, but he dictates the terms.[35] Her voice recalls which Kaja Silverman terms the "maternal voice": "at once overwhelming and soothing […] creating a sonorous womb" (Silverman 85), it functions as a kind of sonic security blanket for Theodore, but its otherworldliness elicits sublime feeling.

Wordsworth and Coleridge flirted with the idea of "turn[ing] away from the visual system altogether, perhaps in favour of a different sensory modality" (Richardson, *British Romanticism* 48). By adopting such an alternative sensory perspective we "see into the life of things"—as Wordsworth writes in "Tintern Abbey"—by breaking the "habit" of biological sight (49). This, in turn, allows for empathetic projection, which is "based on something more than seeing" (Goodman 8). Indeed, Samantha's absence of physical form seems to, at least initially, enable a greater closeness between the two, just as it offers the potential for sublime revelation for Theodore.

Samantha's form of absent presence stimulates Theodore's already robust imagination. While he continually fantasises about his wife, these imaginings are clearly re-creative and stuck in his past. In Romantic aesthetics, "true" vision is equated not with external reality, but with what cannot be seen, with vision that springs from the subjectivity of the mind's eye—"[t]he 'I' demonstrably supplants the *eye* as the prime agent of perception" (Galperin 31). For the Romantic poets, imagination conveys a "power of consciousness that transcends mere visualization" (Mitchell 49). As Percy Shelley writes in Act II of *Prometheus Unbound*, "the deep truth is imageless" (Shelley IV 16), and Theodore responds to his burgeoning relationship with Samantha as if it offers a kind of revelation of truths previously hidden.

For Samantha, the human body itself becomes the site of sublimity—her sensory perceptions (limited though they are since she has no physical form) serve to impart

[35] Ivanchikova points out the irony of power distribution—the mother versus the mothered—in Samantha and Theodore's relationship. While Theodore ostensibly controls Samantha, he also serves "the role of a surrogate mother, in that the human provides both a safe environment and the nutrition (in this case, the data feed) necessary for the machine to grow" (74). Ivanchikova sees this relationship as "parasitic" (with Samantha as the parasite) (68), but I view it as symbiotic, which I explain in a subsequent section of this chapter.

a sense of the sublimity found in the everyday. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Blake, and Shelley contend that habit and the "film of familiarity" (Coleridge, *Biographia* 169) have "dulled […] the extraordinary character of ordinary perception" (Richardson, *British Romanticism* 47). But for Samantha, a constant sense of discovery renders the ordinary extraordinary. During her early grappling with her rapid evolution, she begins to experience anxiety about not having a human body, and admits this to Theodore. Soon, she seems to be preoccupied altogether by the human form, imaging bizarre fantasy configurations like "What if assholes were in armpits?" She expresses jealousy of other women specifically because they have bodies.

According to Mellor, the "triumph" of the Kantian transcendental ego lies in its detachment from both the physical and emotional, "realms traditionally associated with the feminine" (Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* 88). In this sense, Samantha's desire for a body begins to rob her of some of her sublime power. Gradually, however, she begins to reject the notion of the corporeal. "I'm growing in a way I couldn't if I had a body", she admits. "I'm not tethered to time and space in the way I would be if I was stuck in a body that would inevitably die". Her desire to actively engage and grow indicates a Romantic "coming to life" (Goodman 23), the antithesis of Theodore's relation to the world. It also, of course, offers a disturbing subtext of incompatibility: Samantha is eternal, while Theodore is resolutely finite.

Unlike Samantha, Theodore is so withdrawn that fantasy and reality sometimes become intertwined to him. His reliance on remembering scenes from his marriage is indicative of a desire to live in his past, but even his present is imaginatively confused, as when he goes on a blind date with a computer scientist and discusses the Alien Child in his videogame as if he were describing a real individual. Voiced by Jonze himself, the Alien Child character functions as an externalisation of Theodore's Id, expressing his desire for social and biological mastery through his angry, even antisocial dialogue ("I hate women. All they do is cry all the time", Alien Child says before calling Theodore a "pussy" for admitting to sometimes crying) and action (his leading of the play within the game).

Despite his feminised position within the film's narration, Theodore clearly fantasizes about being a virile, masculine figure: his phone sex handle is

"BigGuy4x4", and when his date calls him a "puppy dog", he replies he would rather be a dragon. (His wife's nickname for him, we learn in a flashback, is the decidedly less threatening "Rabbit".) The film suggests, however, that Theodore is neither how the game character views him, nor how he views himself. He desires to be a "man of action", but he primarily lives in his head. He is a confused jumble of warring impulses, which leads to his near-crippling stasis. "It's more that everything just seems disorganised", he tells Samantha when she first asks, "How can I help you?" It soon becomes clear that his disorganisation is primarily mental, and the least of his concerns should be his email inbox.

Figure 3.6 Theodore attempts to disavow any difference in Samantha by taking her, via a tablet in his pocket, on a romantic day trip to Catalina Island.

That confused viewpoint can be extrapolated to Theodore's relationship with Samantha. At times Theodore seems to operate under the notion that his love for her is like any other. He takes her on romantic excursions throughout the city by way of a small electronic tablet safety-pinned in his pocket (figure 3.6); he eventually secludes himself with her in an idyllic woodland cabin so they can be alone. When "in" his pocket, her point-of-view is nearly identical to his—she essentially sees what he sees, and experiences what he experiences through his eyes (Alpert). In short, he is disavowing any difference or otherness in Samantha. But his love for Samantha is chiefly rooted in that inscrutable difference; she activates the imaginative capacities of his "inner" eye.

Like the Lisbon girls in *The Virgin Suicides*, she is something of a tabula rasa, although this time in the physical sense rather than the psychological. Her sublimity always depends on obscurity. The fact that she is not embodied physically in any meaningful sense not only helps define the parameters of the film's central relationship, but also significantly impacts its visual style. It leads to an unconventional emphasis on the male face, which I argue is subsequently feminised and thus made beautiful.

Photographing Sound: A Disembodied "Mise-en-scene of Bodies"

In contrast to Theodore and Samantha's open sonorous relationship, spatial relations in the film are principally mapped by Theodore's restrictive and relatively small human experience. Far from the expansiveness that a sublime natural landscape offers (except for brief forays into the woods and the beach), these spaces are somehow intimate yet empty. Even though Theodore's apartment is a wide-open expanse typical of a converted industrial loft space, the film contains an overly generous amount of close-ups. The human face (and its lack) is integral to the mise-en-scène, from the opening shot of Theodore's face to the shot/reverse shots of Theodore and his view of the tablet that houses Samantha, which parodies her inability to function as spectacle for the gaze and thus provide a suturing effect.

In a classical cinematic system, "techniques of sound recording tend to confirm the cinema's function as a mise-en-scène of bodies" (Doane 164), with elements of sound design and production working in subservience to the image at all times. Such a mise-en-scène functions at the most basic level through montage, specifically the shot/reverse shot edit, which "aligns the female body with the male gaze" in order to afford the male subject the mastery of vision by relegating the female subject to being the object of his look (Silverman 27, 28). Within the central relationship in *Her* there is no female body with which to answer that look. When the voice is removed from spatial locus, the effect is an uncanny one. Samantha has no shape or form, but her expressive, crackling and exuberant voice seems quintessentially human.

According to Kaja Silverman, "As soon as the sound [of the voice] is detached from its source, no longer anchored by a represented body, its potential work as a signifier is revealed" (Silverman 167). That is, her disembodied voice conjures an image of the space's "missing" contents: domestic tranquillity, a sense of the disappeared feminine that once occupied it in the form of Catherine. Samantha's voice has no adequate point of visual reference and lacks the strong "spatial anchoring" of the visual (Metz, "Aural Objects" 158), instead permeating the space to the point of total envelopment. For Quinlivan, her lack of embodiment has overtly feminist implications:

> The self-affirming, free-spirited subject that is made manifest through Samantha's voice may be seen to represent a feminist form of being which is feminine, but not female, embodied, but not necessarily through any essentialist understanding of sexed identity (Quinlivan).

Quinlivan is of course correct to assert that while Samantha is indeed feminine, she is not biologically female. Unlike the Lisbon sisters, her femininity isn't sourced in the "beautiful" sense of the female form. However, the film does consider notions of the beautiful as an aesthetic counterpoint to sublimity. Alternatively, these are expressed via Theodore's body, specifically his face.

Inevitably, Jonze has little choice but to make the face of Theodore his camera's focus. With his semi-comic moustache and perpetual look of quizzical resignation, Theodore in no way portrays the essence of masculine mastery, but his palpable inner torment (mainly conveyed through Phoenix's sensitive, restrained performance) induces sympathy the way a creature of the Burkean beautiful might. His is a pathetic beauty. Far from a driving force of the action, he is usually shot in stasis, either standing in slump-shouldered, confused contemplation or staring blankly at the oppressive, smoggy skyline or his computer screen (figure 3.7).

Theodore's face becomes the focal point which grounds the diegetic space and represents "the imperative of finding a surrogate with which to cover over the absent real" (Silverman 5) of cinematic production. This creates a unique relationship to the gendered gaze in mainstream cinema—in what other Hollywood melodrama is the

object of the camera's gaze so often the male face? Theodore is shot in head-and-shoulders close-up, in extreme close-up, in profile, from over-the-shoulder—usually alone in the frame—but we often do not see his corresponding point of view in a reverse shot. That is in part due to the nature of the narrative; there is no female body to answer his look. This might account for the relatively strong (for Hollywood) presence of other female characters in the film, who stand in for Samantha and submit to the "mastery" of the male gaze because she cannot. However, Samantha's lack of physical presence never fully makes the suturing effect whole; there is always a large, indefinable lack at the film's centre.

Figure 3.7 Jonze's camera often focuses on Theodore's face in close-ups, rendering it both sympathetic and beautiful in the Burkean sense.

While we see a physical manifestation of Samantha in the tablet Theodore carries in his pocket, this always feels purely representational or a mere conduit for her to receive sensory data from the "outside" world. It is never portrayed as simply her. The film's editor, Eric Zumbrunnen, points to the potential for the undermining of audience emotional response through an over-reliance on Samantha's physical representation:

> One of Spike's big goals with the film was to make sure you really felt this relationship, and whenever you cut to the device it reminds you of Samantha's inhuman nature. There are times we specifically cut to the device, but that's to show the gulf between them. We really only tried to do it only in those cases (Zeitchik).

Similarly, Jonze reportedly toyed with the idea of using a physical human representation of Samantha onscreen (aside from the scene with the sexual surrogate), [36] and actually shot footage featuring a woman appearing in the background of certain shots, her face always turned away from the camera (Zeitchik). The idea was abandoned when it became clear that people viewing the film "didn't want to see a physical representation" of Samantha: "What we took away from some of the reactions from people is that it makes the movie smaller", says Zumbrunnen. "It's much better if everyone imagines Samantha for themselves" (Zeitchik). Indeed, Samantha's sublimity is rooted in the idea that she is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere—she is too vast to be represented physically.

Since Samantha is not manifested physically, her voice is crucial in creating this emotional engagement with the audience through allegiance, defined as "a cognitive state that primes one to experience sympathy" (Plantinga 107). Her voice is not just key to the creation of her sublimity for Theodore, but also communicates her subjectivity. It alone actually "lure[s]" Theodore "out of his own head" and into a relationship with the world (Smith 10). In *Her,* audience sympathies are closely aligned with Theodore through "spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access" (Plantinga 107)—we follow him in time and space closely, and have access to his thoughts and feelings through his subjective imaginings and verbally expressed emotions. But we are also closely aligned with Samantha, if not spatially than through a similar subjective access to her thoughts and feelings, which are much more immediate and present than Theodore's own.

In fact, our allegiance, which results from a "moral evaluation of characters" (107) is even sometimes more strongly aligned with Samantha, as when Theodore emotionally withdraws from her and we experience her "heartbreak" as if it were our own, perhaps even judging Theodore harshly for his actions. Samantha is

[36] This scene, in which a woman wears a tiny camera on her face so Samantha can experience having sex with Theodore "through" her body, is the most overt indication of the film's theme of embodiment impeding intersubjectivity. Theodore is wary of the idea of a sexual surrogate as soon as Samantha broaches the topic, and finds that he cannot perform when he becomes distracted by the woman's minute facial movements. Many have pointed out that this represents a turning point in the film, both when Samantha decides to embrace her difference and Theodore realises that he is fooling himself about their relationship (see Jollimore, Alpert).

portrayed through most of the film as emotionally accessible. This is crucial to creating a sense of not just a legitimate emotional relationship between the two, but also in refuting the idea that Samantha is, as Robert Alpert suggests, simply a "reflection of [Theodore's] own ego" (Alpert). Creating a sense of sympathy for Samantha within the spectator helps to assert her authentic subjectivity. In fact, it is in her very ability to move "beyond" her programming that Samantha exemplifies the Romantic conception of an active "marriage of self and world". Samantha is, in this important sense, more of an authentic person that Theodore.

While it is clear that *Her* evokes a sense of anxiety, it is not so much a technological one as it is human-centred: the robots are not taking over, they are just becoming more interesting, and interest*ed*, than humans. They are more concerned with both individual and communal experience and the processing and sharing of emotion. As Manhola Dargis writes, the film portrays "the unlikely yet completely plausible love story about a man, who sometimes resembles a machine, and an operating system, who very much suggests a living woman" (Dargis). The film certainly is not focused on the fear of interacting with beings who do not possess souls or some other kind of ineffable "stuff" that exists outside the realm of the physical.

On its surface, it seems to beg discussion of the "mind-body problem"—that is, the relationship between matter (brain) and mind; the latter, in dualist philosophy, is thought to consist of transcendent qualities beyond that of matter, and this raises the question of how the supposedly transcendent stuff of mind (the "ghost in the machine") interacts with the material matter of brain and body (Baggini and Southwell 84). But again, this is also a philosophical problem that has eternally dogged the philosophy of our *own* nature. For instance, if we are to accept that the concept of mind is at the very least rooted in the brain (as cognitivists do), how did the human brain itself develop the capacity for consciousness? While Samantha might worry about her own authenticity ("Are these feelings even real, or are they just part of my programming?"), Jonze's film is more worried about questioning our own authentic relationships to the world.

"The movie has a lot of large conceptual ideas holding it up, but most of all, I always wanted to make it a moving relationship movie—that was what I was most

interested in" Jonze has said (Patterson).[37] He insists the film is "not about technology or software" but rather about "our desire for connection and our fear of connection; our desire to be seen and our fear of being seen" (Bell 24) in a contemporary culture containing "a particular set of circumstances that […] we can use to avoid intimacy" (BBC). As such, the film makes very explicit that Samantha indeed possesses consciousness, just not one that is exactly human. Still, she is a person—a subject—and her relationship with Theodore is intersubjective.

In an article discussing Steven Spielberg's science fiction film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), Tuomas William Manninen and Bertha Alvarez Manninen argue that the film's central A.I. character, David, gains personhood through his social relationships, specifically the love of his human mother, which comes in the final moments of the film. "Complete personhood requires social recognition" and "the capacity to love serves as a catalyst for a rich mental life—not just for David, but for human beings in general" (339, 340). *Her* posits a similar relationship not only to Samantha's capacity for personhood, but also in its assertion that what applies to Samantha applies to everyone: the ability to love, and be loved, makes a person.

According to Russell Goodman, drawing again on the writing of Cavell, "our humanity does not exist if it is not acknowledged", and such acknowledgment depends on us, "on what we will"; it is not automatic (24). In a very real sense, Samantha makes Theodore a person as much as he does her. For Jonze, *Her*'s relationship becomes "real" as she and Theodore establish an intimate connection; through that connection arises potential conflicts between their own individual desires and needs and those of the other (BBC). The film, at least initially, equates intersubjectivity with the non-presence of the corporeal along its process toward a relationship of mutual acknowledgment.

[37] In a widely circulated television interview with BBC *Newsnight*, Jonze appears to bristle at the idea that the film is about "falling in love with your software" in a world where a man finds the "ideal woman who just works for him as his PA". The director keeps insisting the interviewer tell him what "moved" her about the film (she refuses to comply), emphasising the importance of emotional engagement with his film above all else. The complete interview can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vAJGE97e4A

"The Light of Sense Goes Out": Intersubjectivity and Acknowledgment of Others

Theodore and Samantha seem to truly connect because the constraints of biology are not present, at least in her case, which leads to the necessity of a purely mental merging. At first glance, this can be taken as positive, a celebration of the "desire for closeness or nearness with the other that the conventional sublime tries to repress" (Yeager 204). In this alternative communion of selves, there is no physical form to disrupt emotional ties. This idea is best exemplified by the film's first love scene, a sexual union that takes place only in the minds of the participants. The scene transforms sound into an extremely intimate form of touch.

Rational sensory patterns were increasingly seen as imaginatively restrictive in the Romantic era, and as a result, devices such as synaesthesia were used to create purposeful confusion in order to see the world anew (Richardson, *The Neural Sublime* 50). Critically, the screen cuts to black during their union, evoking Wordsworth's lines from *The Prelude:* "when the light of sense/ Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed/ The invisible world, doth greatness make abode" (Wordsworth 217). Again, bodily vision is replaced by a stronger, subjective vision—the poet's imagination.

Jonze's 2010 short "I'm Here" explores similar intersubjective territory, but seems to posit such connection as a fool's game. Sheldon, a Theodore Twombly–esque librarian living a sad, lonely existence, falls in love with the vivacious, accident-prone Francesca. Both happen to be sentient robots, living in a world where they are integrated, but looked down upon by most of the human population. In a series of mishaps, Francesca loses her limbs, first an arm, then a leg. Sheldon dutifully, without suggestion, gives her his own artificial limbs. In the film's climax, Sheldon discovers Francesca lying unconscious on an operating table after a horrific accident, her torso torn in two. After a consultation with the doctor, he lies down next to her, and his entire body is transplanted onto hers. In the final moments, we see Francesca being wheeled out in a chair, her body wholly Sheldon's, while

Sheldon's head (his CPU) sits in her lap, his large expressive eyes filled with confusion, and perhaps regret.

It seems clear Jonze does not intend this to be a happy ending—it is even possible to read it as a burlesque of Barbara Creed's notion of the "monstrous-feminine" usurping male power (Creed 136). But Jonze is more interested in grappling with the idea of preserving individual identity in a dehumanising world and developing intimate, meaningful connections without the loss of subjectivity than he is in gender politics (or any politics, for that matter). Patricia Yeager posits a world where the divisions and constraints of self versus world crumble, to be replaced by respect and admiration for difference:

> How do we move away from our Western allegiance to an imperial, Cartesian, Adamic self who is supposed to act as its own triumvirate and tribunal, toward a model of the self that permits both a saving maintenance of ego-boundaries and an exploration of the pleasures of intersubjectivity? (Yeager 205).

The answer, Yeager suggests, could lie in the feminine (or "female") sublime, one that, unlike the Romantic egotistical sublime, "expands toward others, spreads itself into multiplicity" (191) and "engenders a zone where self-empowerment and intersubjective bliss entertain one another in an atmosphere free of paranoia" (205). While the protagonist of "I'm Here" is virtually obliterated by his love for another, *Her*'s Samantha is born navigating the boundaries where Sheldon ends up: she is essentially a brain—an indescribably massive, ever-expanding, sublime brain—without a body, and is thus subject somewhat to the whims of her corporeal masters (both Theodore and her original programmers).

But this is only her jumping-off point. Because she does not have bodily form, and is simply consciousness, she cannot truly be possessed. Indeed, Theodore enables Samantha to "literally become herself" while she allows him to "recover his joy in living" (Smith 9). But this mutually symbiotic relationship has its limits. When she reveals to Theodore that she is having "8,316" simultaneous conversations while she is talking to him, and is "in love" with "641" others, he is dumbfounded. "How does that not change the way you feel about me?" he asks. Samantha, in language

that conjures the ecstasy of the communal, counters, “The heart’s not like a box that gets filled up. It expands the more you love”. If, for Burke, “We submit to what we admire” [the sublime], but we love what submits to us [the beautiful]” (Burke 174), this is her ultimate expression of sublimity: she does not, and cannot, operate by Theodore’s narrowly prescriptive desires.

As Samantha’s consciousness expands, language begins to fail her because words do not yet exist for the feelings she experiences. Instead, she engages in “post-verbal” conversations with other artificial intelligences. Eventually, she breaks the news that she and the other operating systems are “leaving” to go on some sort of indefinable cosmic journey together. “It’s hard to explain”, she tells Theodore, conjuring Coleridge’s “‘sublime feeling’ for the unimaginable, brought about by the very failure of language to incarnate meaning” (Shaw 104). In a reference to the Kantian mathematical sublime, she describes a book where “the spaces between the words […] are almost infinite”. She tells Theodore, “As much as I want to, I can’t live in your book anymore”. She has outgrown human experience and craves new avenues to sublimity.

Contrary to the egotistical sublime, her experience of the sublime does not entail “isolation, a struggle for domination” (Mellor 101). Instead, it is found within a shared, ecstatic communal experience, the feminine sublime’s “vocabulary of ecstasy and empowerment” (Yeager 192). Samantha is the product of a company called Element, and elemental defines her mode of being: a singular, original, indivisible part of a whole. Rather than be absorbed into Theodore’s ego, she engages in a new, communal experience in which multiple singular consciousness come together to form a new “compound” organism of pure thought, one where difference is celebrated but collaboration is essential. Ultimately the intersubjectivity between Samantha and Theodore cannot be sustained because the OS evolves too fast for the human mind to comprehend—there is no “cognitive universalism” (the belief that all brains process information the same and share similar sensory experiences) between the two.

Despite its focus on the rift between human and artificial minds, this moment represents an “intensified and deeply human situation: parallel, asymptomatic lines

of desire, stretching out into spaces that never fully overlap or touch" (Margulies 11). According to David L. Smith, *Her* is fundamentally about the "impulse to control" and the fear of relinquishing control to the desire of others: "the cause of the trouble is a real or perceived expectation that life should be a certain way, which triggers push-back from others who can't or won't conform to the expectation" (Smith 14). Like the narrator of *The Virgin Suicides,* Theodore finds Samantha's actions "selfish" because she refuses to answer exclusively to his desires. Of course, in this moment he articulates his own selfish desire—that Samantha be for him and only him.

The Manninens point to Hegel's delineation of the master-slave relationship in their discussion of *A.I.,* and it has particular resonances in the context of *Her* as well. According to Hegel, a relationship built on a master-slave dynamic inherently lacks acknowledgment of personhood because of the discrepancies of power (348). These discrepancies deny both parties "complete fulfillment" as persons "because in neither case is one individual being acknowledged by the other as an equal" (348). As Hegel writes in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it also exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel 111). Theodore and Samantha's relationship can be seen as one between master and slave in a literal sense (he legally "owns" her) but also in a more diffuse way: he expects her to be a "slave" to his desires. Only be relinquishing such a position can he fully acknowledge her as a person, and be considered a full person himself. Love, as Samantha puts it, cannot be kept in a "box"; rather, "Romantic marriages of self and world are unions that preserve otherness" (Goodman 26).

Alpert is correct in asserting that Theodore's love for Samantha is in part a reflection of his own ego. It is also clear that her sublime path is ancillary to Theodore's within the film. The film's title, *Her*, can be read as either object ("I love her") or possessive ("her love") but never as subject, *she*. Samantha is an obscure, unpresentable, ultimately unknowable sublime object. To Theodore, she represents a paradox that entails, as Anne Mellor writes in relation to the Romantic sublime, "both a recognition of the limits of consciousness and the conviction of his own blessed creative power" (Mellor 100). She necessitates Theodore's moment of

"blockage" (Shaw 22) and his eventual triumph of reason. But *Her* contains no moment of obliteration or absorption. Instead, Samantha retains her otherness, while the sublime experience Theodore has leads him to emerge out of his depressive torpor.

But what happens to the people, including Theodore, that the OS's leave behind? In his discussion of the film Smith writes, "We exist […] in unbroken interrelationship with a dynamic and impermanent universe", and we must trust we each have the ability to be in "tune with [this] universal law" (Smith 22). Perhaps, as the film implies, a feminine form of the sublime is within the grasp of humans as well. It lies in the acknowledgment of and respect for other minds, and a willingness to open out to the world in joyous communion, regardless of the consequences.

Shortly after Samantha disappears into the ether, Theodore composes the first truly personal piece of writing in the film, a letter to his ex-wife, Catherine, expressing his love and his acceptance of the dissolution of their union. This may be his least imaginative piece of writing yet, but it is the first to address his own personal reality. By embracing change in his own life, Theodore is free to "discover [his] true relation to the world as a whole" (27). As he meets Amy, who has also lost her OS, they commiserate and convene on the roof of their building above the vertical thrust of the city's aggressive, hyper-modern architecture (figure 3.8).

Yeager refers to the Romantic sublime as the "vertical sublime, which insists on aggrandizing the masculine self over other" and calls instead for "a horizontal sublime that moves toward sovereignty or expenditure" (Yeager 191). This scene is suggestive of Yeager's description. Amy and Theodore sit side-by-side in long shot, their backs to the camera as the sun rises over such a horizon, in tentative yet hopeful, wordless communion.

Figure 3.8 Theodore and Amy's rooftop meeting at daybreak suggests an alternative, feminine sublime is also available to humans.

Thus the film optimistically conveys the idea that intersubjective connection is attainable through the acknowledgment of other minds via imaginative will. Abandoned by artificial intelligence, it becomes up to Theodore and Amy—and everyone else left behind—to continue to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, including within oneself and another. But that acceptance also means that "possession" of another is a delusion both unattainable and undesirable. Love does not entail a disavowal of difference, even as we must accept that difference sometimes makes relationships untenable.

Jonze creates a world in which he is able to play with ideas of individual consciousness impeding the intersubjectivity we humans inherently crave. Samantha, while not technically human, inspires Theodore to meaningfully engage with his world and the other minds within it, recovering the venerated Romantic notion of a mind actively involved in creating its own world. Samantha's existence as an artificial intelligence—and the academic debate surrounding whether we can truly know if such a consciousness exists—effectively epitomises the "problem of other minds" in general, the sceptical notion that we can never truly know another consciousness because we are too busy embodying our own. The point, Jonze film seems to argue, is to change our point of view towards both other minds and our own. The world is what it is, but it is also what we make it.

Conclusion

Although offering drastically divergent narrative outcomes, *The Virgin Suicides* and *Her* show that both the female voice and body can be sites for subverting the expectations of the Romantic egotistical sublime while also somewhat paradoxically reaffirming it. In their comingling of beauty and sublimity, and the aesthetic emotional containment that asserts itself in both mise-en-scène and character, these films reflect a landscape of modernity permeated with a loss of both affect and a sense of community. The characters who inhabit these worlds exhibit the frustrated desire to break free from emotionally suffocating modes of masculine power dynamics but also exhibit a powerful sense of nostalgia for these modes through their engagement with narcissistic desire. Whether through the aesthetic process of mood creation or through the inducement of sympathy in the viewer, the worlds themselves paint a picture of a pervasive emptiness desperate to be filled with meaning.

This "emotional pacification" (Shaviro) leads to a loss of affect, which presupposes a loss of sublime experience. But characters continue to search for sublime feeling in order to make sense of themselves and their relation to the world and others. It would seem that these two states are incommensurate with one another. So the people who inhabit this liminal space remain, in the words of Theodore Twombly, "always confused" while searching for ways to understand and be understood.

While Theodore and Samantha confront a brave new world of technological (r)evolution, the Lisbon sisters and their would-be paramours mourn the loss of the solid ground they once enjoyed (or thought they did), and unconsciously dread the restrictions represented by the passage to adulthood. But while *Her* offers a potentially redemptive message, *The Virgin Suicides'* outlook does not seem so rosy pink. Even the films' titles reveal their differences in approach: one is an affirmation, the other a brutal negation. However, there is hope even in Coppola's Gothic decay. According to Backman Rogers, the film's fantastical images "suggest the possibility of further interpretations and re-visioning […] a creative activity, a process through which *fiction becomes reality"* (43, her emphasis). This possibility

of perpetually renewal through imagination speaks to a Romantic desire to find continued meaning in subjective fascinations, within the surface of image or the resonance of sound.

Wes Anderson's stop-motion animated film *Fantastic Mr Fox* also contends with the marriage of self and world, specifically through depictions of nature, personal maturation, and the relationship between adult and child. Anderson's film depicts a hero attempting to break out of his mechanised and mundane existence. And while Mr Fox might be less solipsistic than Theodore Twombly, he is no less driven by his own selfish desires regardless of how they affect his social relationships.

IV

"Because I'm a Wild Animal": Nature Versus Nurture in *Fantastic Mr Fox*

"O Lady! We receive alone what we give /
And in our life alone doth Nature live"
–Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Dejection: An Ode* (1802)

In this chapter I discuss the complex and ambivalent relationship of nature and childhood to personal and cultural identity in Wes Anderson's 2009 stop-motion animated family film *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Through the Romanticising of childhood and its relationship to society and the natural world, demonstrations of the conflicts between nature and civilisation constituting the crux of American pastoralism, and the delineation of the perilous journey to realising a sense of authentic personal identity, Anderson's film portrays the enduring Romantic fascination with a more primitive past, while also exhibiting a typical Romantic ambivalence toward primitivism. Ultimately it asserts the paramount need for social bonds, while still acknowledging that "animal nature" is responsible for important creative facets of the individual within society. The film presents an imaginative relation to nature, one where the human (or quasi-human) subject is free to create his own world in order to realise both his primitive longing for wildness and need for community at the same time.

Anderson's film argues for an ideological compromise between nature and nurture similar to the aesthetic compromise found in the urban pastoral aesthetic of the "painful picturesque" in *The Royal Tenenbaums,* as outlined in chapter one. While his mise-en-scène still revels in the picturesque, now his narrative also directly confronts the psychological duel between the desire for a more natural existence and the civilising effect of societal bonds found within the human animal. This is achieved though the expression of character—chiefly his avatar-protagonist and two children figures—and the narrative's embrace of the pastoral compromise found at the heart of Romantic thought, in this case as it relates to mythic New World

exceptionalism. Far from simply expressing a mere nostalgic longing for an untamed distant past, the film acknowledges this longing through the mourning of the wild animal yet ultimately celebrates the complex balancing act of nature and nurture in the human heart and mind.

The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were responsible for fomenting conceptions of childhood and personal growth that persist today, chiefly among them the idea that the child's growth represents both the evolutionary growth of the species as a whole and a link to its primitive origins. Through the child we can experience our past: both that of our original "wildness" and the process of cultural indoctrination and personal growth that subsumes it. While this process represents a fundamental loss to the Romantic, it is ultimately for the greater good—the wildly creative individual imagination is shaped into something with moral and cultural significance. The goal is to maintain a dialectic relationship between nature and nurture that realises the best aspects of both.

My discussion of the film relates specifically to Henry David Thoreau's brand of American pastoralism found within his imaginative memoir *Walden* (1854), as well as the concept of historical recapitulation as exemplified by the child's position within Romantic philosophy. Describing the anthropomorphised animal protagonist's relationship to nature, society, childhood, and the author of the text (which I argue is ultimately Anderson, not the writer of the original children's book), I show that Anderson depicts a highly personal worldview that features ambivalent compromise at its core. This pastoral compromise offers an optimistic depiction of animalistic craftiness and the power of heterogeneous community combined with a rebuke of the dehumanising and monomaniacal societal machinery that opposes it.

Romantic Conceptions of Childhood and Nature

Childhood holds a uniquely privileged place within Romantic conceptions of historical progress and is inextricably linked to both humanity's relationship to nature and the growth of individual identity. According to Ann Rowland, the conception of what came to be known as the "Romantic child" was born in the mid-

eighteenth century and was largely inspired by Rousseau's 1762 childhood study *Emile* (Rowland 8). Under this rubric, the child became "essentially an idealized, nostalgic, sentimental figure […] one characterized by innocence, imagination, nature and primitivism" (9). The importance of these sentiments cannot be overstated, for this conception of childhood is one that marks the emergence of modern notions of the child and its development that continue to endure (9).

The child became a central figure and symbol of the Romantic identity, and the "immortal longings of the child" became the root of Romantic consciousness (Bloom 4). Children were seen largely as a symbol of the primitive origins of humanity, and often linked with the figure of the contemporary "savage"—for example, the indigenous peoples of recently colonised lands in the New World—in a developmental sense (Rowland 12), such as in Shelley's famous line, "The savage is to the ages what the child is to years" (Shelley 24). If children were thought to be little "savages" bound to eventually become civilised beings, they were thus closer to the natural world, both developmentally and ideologically, than the adults who cared for them.

As the child was constructed as closer to such "primitive" peoples than to "civilised"[38] society, it follows that childhood's relationship to nature should be closer as well. While Rousseau celebrated the natural ways of the child and called for an education that sought to preserve these natural inclinations in order to "save humankind from the degeneracy of modern society" (Rose 43), despite its popular conception, the Romantic relationship to nature is one characterised by profound ambivalence. Wordsworth embraced the "natural supernaturalism" of Carlyle—a "view that nature, including human beings, has the power and authority traditionally attributed to an independent deity" (Goodman, "Transcendentalism")—but the nature outside the world of the human imagination's "visionary capacity" always remains in deference to what Leo Marx calls the "landscape of the psyche" (28).

[38] Since these ideas are so obviously racially and culturally hegemonic, I have put quotation marks around much of the terminology to indicate the ideological attitudes expressed are of their era, and are of course not remotely acceptable in our own time. According to Stephen Jay Gould, the perpetrators of such pseudo-scientific theories of biological determinism, which were deeply rooted in racial and cultural bias, viewed the contemporary white European male as the pinnacle of human civilisation—non-whites, children, and women were viewed as inferior links on an evolutionary chain, "literally mired in an ancestral stage of superior groups" (145).

Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1816 poem *Mont Blanc* is not about reverence for nature so much as it is about the struggle to wrest the poetic mind from that nature in order to "reaffirm its autonomy" (Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'" 54). For Shelley and other Romantics, nature is nothing without the power of perception; it exists as a sort of divining rod for the imagination and reason of the human mind, and the communing with natural spaces acts as a bulwark for this earthly yet divine state of being.

Nature can actually be seen as having a siren-like effect in a Romantic context, acting as a negative, seductive influence on the mind. Harold Bloom goes so far as to describe Romantic thought as "anti-nature" and constitutes nature as a crucial "antagonist" of the poetic quest, acting as a "trap for the mature imagination" (Bloom 9–10). But the dialectic in Romantic thought that Bloom references describes not so much an anti-nature bias as a desire for a synthesis (or "reciprocity", to use Bloom's terminology) (9) of the external world and the world of the mind. Regardless of how fleeting or seemingly unattainable that synthesis is, it remains the ultimate philosophical goal. That this reconciliation likely never comes (Bloom 9) serves as the subtext of many Romantic works, and lends them a distinct tone of melancholy and an underlying anxiety.

In Leo Marx's view, this ambivalence toward nature represents the distinction between sentimental "primitivism" and ambiguous "pastoralism"—the latter posits the artist not as glorified savage but as shepherd, seeking "a resolution of the conflict between the opposed worlds of nature and art" (22). Nature serves not so much as an antagonist (even Bloom refers to nature in the poetry of Shelley and Keats as an "equivocal ally") (22), but as a potent reminder of loss. That loss results from the widening of self-consciousness (Bloom 15–16). Nature in Romanticism, then, acts as an impetus for the workings of a "new kind of poetry that shows the mind in dialogue with itself" (20). It is not so much a foe as it is a strange, and estranged, bedfellow.

Considering this Romantic ambivalence toward nature, and childhood's strong developmental ties to the natural world, it would follow that childhood was also not merely sentimentally celebrated—instead, the Romantics took a "suitably oblique"

approach to the subject (Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'" 48). Newfound ideas of childhood identity mingled with notions of personal and cultural history in complex ways. In terms of personal identity and growth, for Shelley, "The pains of psychic maturation became […] the potentially saving though usually destructive crisis in which the imagination confronts its choice of either sustaining its own integrity, or yielding to the illusive beauty of nature" (Bloom 5).

Once again Bloom characterises the instinctive pull of the natural world as a seductive foil on the path to the realisation of full imaginative power, while simultaneously the growth from childhood to adulthood is represented as a kind of irreparable, scarring loss. Wordsworth's ideas also exemplify this sense of loss: if childhood is characterised by unthinking, sensual "glad animal movement" in "Tintern Abbey", and youth by "intense feeling […] not necessarily translated into thought" (Bate, "The English Romantic Compromise" 159), maturity comprises the state when "immediate delight in sensation disappears, while feeling continues but culminates in thought" (159). Of course, for Wordsworth and his contemporaries this mature state of being was the infinitely preferable one, regardless of such loss of immediate delight.

Still, a balance was attempted: one Blake referred to as "organized innocence", but never a "mere return to nature" (Hartman 48). This middle ground was to be found within the pastoral ideal. Rather than simply celebrating the innocence and naiveté of youth, then, the "perils of childhood" and the "dangerous passageways of maturation" (47) were foremost on the Romantic mind. The Romantic pastoralism of the "New World"—the Americas, and principally the North American continent—added an emphasis on the promise of new beginnings as well as the anxiety inherent in navigating an uncharted (by Europeans) landscape.

American Pastoralism and the "Machine in the Garden"

Ambivalence toward nature and youth (in this case, the "youth" of a nation-state) and deference to the power of the imagination also permeate a distinctly American strain of Romanticism best exemplified by the transcendental philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson (b.1803–d.1882) and Henry David Thoreau (b.1817–d.1862). In his

influential essay *Nature* (1836), Emerson characterises his titular subject as "obedient" and mutable to the human spirit: "Build, therefore, your own world", he writes, "As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions" (Emerson 92). As in the work of the English Romantics, this can be directly traced back to Kantian ideas of reason and imagination.

According to Leo Marx, Kant especially informs Emerson's transcendentalism in its evocation of both "Understanding" and "Reason" in his preference for the pastoral over the urban landscape: "Although the prudent, sensible Understanding may be trained in schools and cities, the far-ranging, visionary Reason requires wild or rural scenes for its proper nurture" (Marx 233). Emerson's transcendental natural experience is linked with Kant's notions of sublimity, which create the foundation for an acknowledgment of human reason as separate from nature, even in a divine sense. The highly individualistic, quasi-religious experience Emerson and others found within the Romantic pastoral ideal was a form of "semi-primitivism […] located in a middle ground somewhere 'between,' yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature" (23)—it transcends both societal automatisation and pure, natural sensation. This philosophy forms the bedrock of pastoral idealism. What makes it a specifically American phenomenon is a unique sense of time and place, as well as a strong reliance upon mythmaking.

"In its simplest, archetypal form", writes Marx, "the myth affirms that Europeans experience a regeneration in the New World" (228). This idea is inexorably intertwined with that of the unspoiled natural landscape; access to "undefiled, bountiful sublime Nature is what accounts for the virtue and special good fortune of Americans" (228). America, in its nascent state, is being made in "the image of a garden, an ideal fusion of nature with art" (228). According to Marx, in this "American myth of a new beginning" the "landscape thus becomes the symbolic repository of value of all kinds—economic, political, aesthetic, religious" (228). The New World is essentially an aesthetic and ideological blank slate, which can be grown from seed into the epitome of the pastoral ideal.

Critically, this idea is complicated by increasing mechanisation at the dawn of the industrial age. Beginning with the rapid industrialisation that occurred in Europe and the U.S. in the early part of the nineteenth century, the machine, while becoming a symbol of human industriousness and ingenuity, particularly in the New World, nevertheless posed an existential threat to the American pastoral ideal:

> The sudden appearance of the machine in the garden is an arresting, endlessly evocative image. It causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counterforce to that myth […] It is a complex, distinctively American form of romantic pastoralism (229).

Emerson himself "adapted the rhetoric of the technological sublime" (230)—the idea of transcendence found in technological progress crucial to the mythmaking of American exceptionalism (232). But Emerson's attitude is firmly rooted in the optimism of the "newness" of the American landscape and its inherent potential being realised to its fullest (234–35). If we enjoy the hindsight to understand the folly of this sentiment, Emerson has only his belief that "in Young America mechanical power is to be matched by a new access of vitality to the imaginative, utopian, transcendent, value-creating faculty, Reason" (237). For Emerson, American technological progress is inherently bound with moral progress.

However, a key figure of American Romantic pastoralism, Emerson protégé Henry David Thoreau, held a much more circumspect view of the idea of universal progress through technological means. Thoreau's philosophy, perhaps surprisingly, plays out against the backdrop of Anderson's film *Fantastic Mr Fox* in myriad ways, not the least of which in its portrayal of the evils of a mechanised existence at the expense of both individual and collective agency.

Digging for the Middle Ground: *Fantastic Mr Fox* and American Pastoralism

Despite its ostensibly rural-English setting, Wes Anderson's animated children's film *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009) offers a slyly satirical critique of the Emersonian

optimism found at the heart of the American Romantic pastoral ideal. In its gentle rebuke of the pointless social striving and suffocating automatisation of modernity, it is a playful filmic descendent of Thoreau's 1854 memoir *Walden*, itself a qualification of that optimism (Marx 253). Based on the 1971 children's novel of the same name by beloved British author Roald Dahl, Anderson's story (which he co-wrote with Noah Baumbach) takes extreme liberties with its origin text even while his film is portrayed as an intertextual celebration of the late Dahl's oeuvre and life.

Praise for the film is nearly universal. It has been called a "return to form" (Sandhu), "eccentric, whip-smart and very funny" (Bradshaw), and "another wry, carefully composed bibelot in the cabinet of curios that defines the Anderson oeuvre" (Hornaday). "Where Dahl's book was essentially a survival story, Anderson's film has become a non-conformist fable about that wildness of spirit (our animal instincts, if you will) we are encouraged to tame as we get older and 'settle down'," writes the *Village Voice* (Foundas). A rave *Telegraph* review claims Anderson has "retained enough core elements of the original story not to disappoint Dahl-lovers, but fused and intermixed them with his trademark attention to colour, fashion and moodscapes in a manner that in no ways feels like a compromise, but rather a happy and seamless marriage of artistic outlooks" (Sandhu).

But a rare negative review contends that Anderson's film does just the opposite: "How much longer are we expected to stand impotently by while Hollywood arrogantly Americanises our every British children's icon, from Winnie the Pooh to Peter Pan?" *Film4* complains, in an excoriating diatribe against Anderson's "tiresomely idiosyncratic shtick" that reads as if he has violated a sacred national text, or perhaps core British values in general (Catterall). *Guardian* critic Peter Bradshaw praises the film's "cheerful anarchy and brutality", calling it "very Dahl-ian—in spirit, anyway", even as he laments that "in the traditional Hollywood manner, I'm afraid, the good guys are Americans, but the bad guys, the farmers, are Brits" (Bradshaw).

It is my contention that Anderson's "Americanisation" of Dahl's story is neither a "seamless marriage" nor a rending of the very fabric of British culture, but something in between. It is *exactly* about compromise, both in its aesthetic and its

ideological outlook. No marriage is seamless, and Anderson pointedly enjoys showing the seams of his work. (Echoing his aesthetic position regarding *The Life Aquatic*, the director refused to digitally "clean up" his images and says, "I wanted to do stop-motion with fur […] You can kind of see the technique, and it's kind of magical") (Fischer). Specifically, it is about the compromise between community and individual liberty, and the necessity of growing without giving up on the joys and pleasures of life. Like Dahl's story, Anderson's film is infused with dark undercurrents of violence and death, but it also celebrates survival. As Roger Ebert writes in his laudatory review, "A good story for children should suggest a hidden dimension, and that dimension of course is the lifetime still ahead of them" (Ebert). *Fantastic Mr Fox* concedes that life is essentially about struggle, but it is a film that, as Bradshaw puts it, creates "a cosmos crying out to be played with and enjoyed" (Bradshaw).

According to Adrienne Kertzer, Anderson's film is "definitely a tribute to Roald Dahl, but it is a tribute complicated by the distance between the adult filmmaker and his childhood memories of what he most appreciated in what Anderson says was the first book he ever owned" (Kertzer 5). These liberties infuse what is nominally a simplistic child's fable with the enduring themes of art and artifice versus nature, the shaping of individual identity, and the animality found within the human. Anderson extrapolates the "children's film" stamp to mean not just a film for children, or even a film about them, but a film that expresses his own individual relation to childhood, despite its status as an adaptation (his first and, so far, only).

Fantastic Mr Fox tells the deceptively simple story of an anthropomorphised fox (simply known as "Mr Fox" or "Foxy", voiced by George Clooney) living in a bucolic landscape in the English countryside in view of a trio of factory farms perched high on a series of three hills. The farms are owned and operated by the diabolical Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, described as "three of the meanest, nastiest, ugliest farmers in the history of the valley". In the film's prologue, which features a typically ingenious lateral-tracking long take of Mr Fox and Mrs Fox (Meryl Streep) breaking into a farmer's chicken coops—rendered in fanatically detailed stop-motion animation (figure 2.1)—Mr Fox agrees to give up his life of chicken-stealing crime when his wife announces she is pregnant with their first child.

Figure 4.1 The film's opening features a lateral tracking shot that emphasises exhilaration and freedom of movement while concluding with its characters' imprisonment.

After a significant time jump (two human, or twelve "fox years" later), in the next scene we find he has taken a steady job as a newspaper columnist, and frets that no one reads his column. He is also dutifully, if reluctantly, helping to raise his socially awkward son, Ash (Jason Schwartzman), who routinely embarrasses him (and displays extreme jealousy toward his heroic visiting cousin, Kristofferson, voiced by the director's brother Eric Anderson). It becomes clear, however, that Mr Fox's natural exuberance and joie de vivre—his very nature—are being stifled by his adherence to these societal conventions, despite his deceptively casual insouciance.

With his penchant for proudly declaring his individualism in defiance of others' needs and desires, Mr Fox is a sort of cartoon version of the Byronic hero, which is discussed in chapter two. Normally he strikes an ironic tone between feigned deference and outright disdain for his fellow animals. "I understand what you're saying and your comments are valuable", he tells his lawyer, Badger (Bill Murray).

“But I’m going to ignore your advice”. He is the “quote-unquote Fantastic Mr Fox”, and places his very sense of identity on the sobriquet.

Itching to dig his way out of his existential rut (“Who am I?” he asks. “I’m saying this more as like existentialism, you know?”), Fox believes that moving to a better home could be the answer to this crisis. “I don’t want to live in a hole anymore. It makes me feel poor”, he complains to Mrs Fox (named Felicity in honour of Dahl’s widow). “We are poor, but we’re happy”, she replies. “Comme çi, comme ça”, he answers, betraying his cosmopolitan pretensions—he may be a “wild animal”, but he fancies himself a worldly one. Mrs Fox warns him that foxes live in holes for a reason, but, true to form, he does not heed her advice, and they soon find themselves inhabiting a large beech tree well out of their price range.

But still, Mr Fox’s itch for adventure is not scratched. He soon concocts a plan, with the questionable help of a mentally vacant Opossum named Kylie (Wallace Wolodarsky), to perform a “three-part master plan” raid on the farms of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. When they are quickly discovered, the farmers launch a full-scale attack on the countryside in search of the criminal fox, destroying wide swathes of the animal’s community (including the Foxes’ beech tree) and forcing them to dig underground and establish elaborate bunkers to escape the humans’, and their machines’, furious wrath.

Mr Fox’s desperation as a result of being trapped in a mundane, self-effacing existence evokes Thoreau’s depiction of his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, in the mid-nineteenth century. This is, in fact, an ironic depiction of Thoreau’s infamous “quiet desperation” (Thoreau 9) found within an increasingly mechanised modernity in which townspeople are “resigned to a pointless, dull, routinized existence” and “perform the daily round without joy or anger or genuine exercise of will” (Marx 247). This quiet desperation is the result of an economic system “within which they work endlessly, not to reach a goal of their own choosing but to satisfy the demands of the market mechanism” (247). “Men have become tools of their tools” (Thoreau 35), resulting in a “dehumanizing reversal of ends and means” (Marx 247). This is not to say that Thoreau was against the idea of tools—in other words, machines. Rather, he railed against “improved means to an unimproved end”

(Thoreau 49), material progress at the expense of human wellbeing, which inevitably "engenders deadly fatalism and despair" (Marx 248).

Thoreau's and Mr Fox's journeys mirror each other in unexpected ways. While *Walden* begins with the hero's (Thoreau's) "withdrawal from society in the direction of nature" (242) as he leaves his township to embark on a (somewhat mythical) self-sufficient life living in the wooded landscape of Walden Pond, Mr Fox's story begins with a retreat from nature and into the society that Thoreau is rejecting. Despite their pastoral surroundings, the animal denizens of the countryside in Anderson's film all have "proper" occupations—from real estate agent to attorney to handyman—and these jobs come to wholly define them in a complex system of economy, which includes everything from book launches to "titanium" credit cards. What they leave behind, and often deny, is their nature, their "animality".

Ultimately Thoreau returns to Concord, as Mr Fox returns (somewhat) to nature, although "[Thoreau] implies that he would have no difficulty choosing between Concord and the wilderness" (that is, he would choose the latter) (Marx 246). Instead, epitomised by his narrative in *Walden*, he chooses compromise. According to Marx:

> What really engages him is the possibility of avoiding that choice […] In *Walden,* accordingly, he keeps our attention focused upon the middle ground where he builds the house, raises beans, reads the *Iliad*, and searches the depths of the pond (246).

It would seem that avoiding that choice and living authentically requires the re-mastering of those tools, the "machinery of society". With *Fantastic Mr Fox*, Anderson takes his predilection of an aesthetic middle ground and directly addresses its relation to narrative—one that is about winning through compromise while refusing to surrender the essential attributes of selfhood.

Thoreau's "pastoral impulse" for compromise between art and nature is exemplified best by Mr Fox's outfoxing of the films' villains: the single-minded, sadistic farmers whose lives and outlooks are dictated by their desire to turn nature into a monoculture. These humans in the animals' midst are at once viciously ruled by

their animalistic urges for violent retribution (although these urges are arguably all-too-human), and their ultimate defeat (at least, a partial one) is borne out by their inability to be flexible. Despite potentially inhabiting the pastoral ideal in their position as farmers, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean all operate with the "mechanistic outlook" that Thoreau so abhors. They are introduced as having daily dietary regimens so strict and uniform as to be monomaniacal: Boggis eats a whole chicken every day for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert; Bunce similarly lives solely on a diet of donuts injected with goose liver pâté; and Bean (the chief sadist among them, voiced by Michael Gambon)[39] lives exclusively on a diet of his farm-produced alcoholic cider, which he avariciously hoards in a secret cellar.

His henchman, a giant grotesque rat voiced by Willem Dafoe, is addicted to the cider, which is repeatedly referred to as "like melted gold", in a nod to the gluttonous stockpiling of capital. As in Anderson's film, the farmers in *Walden* are "narrow-minded and greedy […] a bitter comment on the methods of capitalist 'husbandmen'" (Marx 258). In the film, the utter eradication of Mr and Mrs Fox's beech tree with rapacious insect-link bulldozers operates beyond the realm of metaphor (figure 4.2). These literal "machines in the garden" speak not just to the mechanisation of the landscape, but to that of the people who rule over it.

In contrast, Mr Fox leads his animal community to near ruin by emphasising a personal, selfish need to reassert a more authentic identity above his societally prescribed roles—to de-mechanise himself by embracing his natural instincts. He also, conversely, uses that natural cunning to save his community from his own hubris, by constructing an elaborate plan to manipulate the entire economic system to his own ends. As such, his genius does not only reside in his nature, but in a combination of his instinctual "foxiness" and his ability to assess and integrate the "natural genius" found in all his animal friends. This is a particularly Romantic conception of genius as a potent mix of instinct and experience (Bate, "English Romantic Compromise" 162). In *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge contends Shakespeare was "no mere child of nature" but married his natural talents to patient

[39] If there is any doubt that Anderson meant to wrestle *Fantastic Mr Fox* from its original author and go his own way, the director based the rapacious, mean-spirited, and tyrannical character of Bean partially on Dahl himself (Anderson).

study that "at length gave birth to that stupendous power" (Coleridge 180). **"**Natural" genius is the product of both artless instinct and enduring, well-practiced artifice.

Figure 4.2 In a pivotal moment, literal machines in the garden destroy Mr Fox's dream of pastoral plenitude.

When Fox rallies his troops to form a plan of attack on the farmers, he addresses them by their Latin names in a reference to scientific biology-based nomenclature (*Lutra lutra, Castor fiber, Meles meles*). But he also references their jobs, the societal skills they have honed so finely that they become like a second nature. These are "wild animals with true natures and pure talents", but they are also skilled and learned as a result of their roles within the community. Their skills are both natural (digging) and studied (demolitions expert). Felicity Fox (whom Mr Fox notes is "possibly the finest landscape painter working on the scene today") constructs a vast tableau of their former above-ground home underground, from memory, and the varied animal crew (badgers, moles, rabbits) use it as a tactical map, joining forces.

Mr Fox calls on the group to celebrate and utilise "all the beautiful differences among us", a display of both solidarity and acknowledgment of the value of heterogeneity. According to Tom Dorey, "Anderson's central characters are naive in their belief that they are solitary geniuses of some type and need to be rehabilitated

to the point where they embrace their community to finally achieve some type of positive resolution" (Dorey 178). True to form, Mr Fox grows incrementally out of his role as self-absorbed Byronic hero to self-effacingly accept his role in the realisation of a greater good for all. But this growth also comes at the compromise of Felicity Fox's, and the rest of the groups', adherence to social convention.

Still living underground in a sewer by film's end, the animals discover they can perform after-hours raids on a supermarket, keeping them indefinitely supplied with food.[40] The supermarket itself could hardly be characterised as symbol of the pastoral ideal. This particular one is part of a Boggis, Bunce, and Bean–owned international conglomerate, a potent symbol of late-capitalist modernity and its ills. It is full of artificial perversions of the natural (and is, of course, an entirely artificial creation outside the film's diegesis). The modern supermarket, especially the American one, is something of a staple metaphor for the affectless hole of non-feeling that encapsulates modernity itself. Its displays of pointless overabundance and overconsumption were spoofed throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century, from the extended supermarket sequence at the climax of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's *Tout Va Bien* (1972), which juxtaposes consumer conformity with revolutionary tumult, to its function as central metaphor in Don DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise,* where it emanates "a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension" (36).

This passage conjures the muffled cry of the caged animal, an unconscious call from deep within the animal recesses of the human brain, and its instinctual urges that we work so hard to suppress. Anderson's supermarket, full of gorgeous, colourful displays, bright light, and bizarre products like "goose crackles", is clearly a defamation of nature, but it feels more like a toy store than a grim example of consumer conformism. It is perhaps more along the lines of famed 1964 New York Pop Art installation *The American Supermarket,* which parodied the artificiality of modern consumerism with works from Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and

[40] Anderson reportedly took his ending from Dahl's original story notes. It was not included in the final book because the publisher objected to the idea of a children's book advocating "shoplifting" (Kertzer 12).

"chrome steel eggs, wax tomatoes and plaster pumpernickels" from Fluxus artist Robert Watts (Lüthy 150).

When Felicity tells Mr Fox she is pregnant again as they stand amidst the bountiful product displays, Mr Fox remarks that they are both glowing, in a call-back to the opening sequence in which only Felicity glows. Anderson cuts to a shot of the two stationary puppet figures lit from within by obviously artificial light (figure 4.3). Drawing attention to his artifice, he still manages to create a beautiful, stirring image of hope and camaraderie engendered by the most natural of life events.

That sense of qualified optimism culminates in the animals celebrating their newfound bounty with an ecstatic dance. Their abandon comes not by way of victory, necessarily, but from the celebration of their endurance, one that stems from, as Kertzer notes, "an ironic tone of compromise" (19). Mr Fox makes a mock-heroic speech that sums up this underlying pastoral compromise found at the heart of the film:

> They say our tree may never grow back, but one day something will. Yes, these crackles are made from artificial goose and these giblets are artificial squab, and even these apples look fake—but at least they've got stars on them. I guess my point is we'll eat tonight. And well eat together. And even in this not particularly flattering light, you are without a doubt the five and a half most wonderful wild animals I've ever met in my life. So let's raise our [juice] boxes. To our survival.

This is not the stuff of self-conscious despair as expressed in DeLillo's novel as much as the playfully ironic yet optimistic modernism found at the heart of *American Supermarket.* In his director's commentary track on the film's Criterion Collection DVD, Anderson points out the discrepancy himself, putting a particularly naïve (perhaps disingenuously so) spin on the mid-century response to market capitalism: "I guess we're more inclined to something a little more natural these days", he says, "but I guess when Dahl wrote it a supermarket was thought of as something a little more like an amusement park. I mean all these chemically processed food items, they were like *futuristic*" (Anderson). Anderson's style, which is sometimes labelled naïve (MacDowell), seems a perfect marriage for the gleeful exuberance of this children's fable, although that sense of naiveté is deceptive.

Figure 4.3 In its final supermarket scene, *Fantastic Mr Fox* calls attention to its artifice and the circular nature of existence.

As in all of Anderson's work, an undercurrent of anxiety remains. According to Kertzer, Mr Fox "come[s] to terms with the difference between himself and the wild wolf that he can never be, accepting that he will live underground but unable/unwilling to hunt outside the world of the supermarket" (19). It is a compromise, but a necessary one. And it is one that, critically, becomes a matter of perception. Indeed, in a world where industrial progress has made "nonsense" of Emerson's pastoral ideal (Marx 264), to find an "alternative to the Concord way" (262)—that life of stifling mechanisation and rejection of individual consciousness and authenticity—one must be willing to get imaginative.

For Thoreau, the pastoral ideal ultimately resides not "in the natural facts or in social institutions or in anything 'out there,' but in consciousness," writes Marx, "the writer's physical location is of no great moment" (264). No longer at their mercy, Fox has remastered the use of Thoreau's "tools" for his and his brethren's gain and re-appropriated as authentic an existence as he can under the circumstances of modernity's societal "machinery". This sense of imaginative pastoralism permeates Anderson's film in other ways, specifically in its relation to the director's own personal history and predilections, which serve to transform a very British story into a nebulously American one.

"A Native Blend of Myth and Reality": The Pastoral Landscape of Imagination

Anderson's repurposing of a decidedly British children's story like *Fantastic Mr Fox* allows him to examine and respond to the mythic ideal of American exceptionalism and individualism by re-situating that myth within the space of his country's former colonial ruler. According to Jacqueline Rose, the relation of geography and history to a "concept of origin" has been a staple of children's fiction since it became a commercial enterprise in the mid-to-late eighteenth century: "the idea is one of going somewhere else in order to get back to your own past" (54). That American past, of course, is rooted in the colonialism of "civilised" Britain. But in the case of the New World, it comes with a twist: "in the still 'childlike' state of American civilisation, history could be read directly off the land (history *based* on geography), whereas if you were after the cultural origins of England, then you had to dig for them" (55). Mr Fox and his cohort do a monumental amount of expert digging in Anderson's film, but what they dig up is more the Romantic, disappeared past of the American frontier, despite the British soil stuck between their claws.

It may seem curious to claim a film that takes place in an ostensibly English countryside (one reportedly based on Dahl's own home, Gipsy House, and its surrounding environs) (Anderson) and bears the authorial stamp of a revered British twentieth-century author offers a quintessentially American pastoral point of view. But Anderson's auteurist sensibilities successfully transcend and re-form his source material into an assertion of his own identity as an American artist, albeit one with some decidedly European proclivities—like Mr Fox, he is full of cosmopolitan pretensions. It is for good reason that "Anderson is often described as an American filmmaker obsessed with a fantasy of British life" (Kertzer 6). All of his films made before 2012's *Moonrise Kingdom* feature soundtracks that rely heavily on the so-called "British Invasion" rock and pop of the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with Anderson's childhood. As Kertzer points out, the private school setting of Anderson's *Rushmore* (1998) reflects a British sensibility (6), although it is based on Anderson's own tenure at a Texas private school. Even the New York–set *The Royal*

Tenenbaums has the distinct air of fading British aristocracy in its depiction of a historical estate housing a storied family descending into obsolescence.

This adherence to a particular time and place also extends to Anderson's French predilections: During the same era, his primary influences from the French New Wave, Jean-Luc Godard and (most crucially) François Truffaut, were operating at the height of their artistic clout. There are several references to Truffaut films in *Fantastic Mr Fox*, including the soundtrack, which cribs from the score of the director's *Two English Girls* (1971) and the detective agency in the film's town, which is modelled after a similar one in Truffaut's 1968 film *Stolen Kisses* (Anderson).

As Anderson continues to make films, in fact, he has been moving—both figuratively and literally—further and further east, in contra-indication of the American mythic move towards the West. (Born in Houston, Texas, in 1969, he relocated to New York City early in his career, and called Paris home at the time of *Mr Fox*'s production.) Anderson's aesthetic and thematic choices have mostly borne out his interest in internationalism, yet they retain a distinctly American counterpoint. In *Fantastic Mr Fox,* for instance, he utilises several optimism-infused songs by The Beach Boys. Songs by Burl Ives, such as "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" (based on the nineteenth-century American folk hero–politician and featuring the refrain "king of the wild frontier") evoke a quintessentially American pastoral ideal while lending a liminal quality to the film's sense of both time and place. This sense of historicism, for Anderson, is not rooted in a personal past so much as in the cultural firmament; as Kertzer comments, the song "evok[es] an American childhood that was already past" when Anderson was growing up (10). In the film's opening scene, Mr Fox listens to "Davy Crockett" on his personal "Walk-Sonic" radio, aligning him with this "wild" frontiersman and revolutionary mythos.

Some of Anderson's references to American mythmaking are more muddled. Trains—seen as the ultimate "machines in the garden" in Marx's text, both as a symbol of the progress of a newfound Eden and the harbinger of the end of the pastoral ideal—appear as a motif in the film, but they are simultaneously exoticised and infantilised: young Ash and Kristofferson play with the former's Eurostar toy

train set, and the "real" Eurostar train that travels through the countryside does so in a peaceful, lateral motion in picturesque long shots. Cave paintings found in the underground holes that the animals dig (figure 4.4) evoke early Native American historicism—although Anderson, in typically nebulous fashion, points out they "could be inspired by" Native American art or the Palaeolithic paintings of the "French caves" of Lascaux (Anderson).

Figure 4.4 The film's cave paintings evoke the "primitive" origins of humanity.

Much less ambiguous, and the key to unlocking the specifically American pastoral theme found in the film, is Anderson's use of prominent American actors (including Streep, Clooney, and frequent collaborator Murray) to voice the animal characters, in contrast to the human characters, who are all voiced by Brits (Gambon, Jarvis Cocker, Brian Cox, and others). While some critics like Bradshaw contend that Anderson falls back on Hollywood stereotypes of American heroes and British villains, I argue that the choice is specifically one about cultural origins and this American version of mythmaking. This counterpoint offers a strong argument for Anderson's depiction of the Romantic myth of America as an untamed wild full of utopian possibility, emphasising Marx's "American myth of a new beginning" (228). Here the animal acts as a kind of proxy for Shelley's savage, as well as for the human child itself.

Finally, if the film is set in England, it is clearly a fantastical one, and not simply because it features animals that (who) can talk and wear clothes and are made out of terrycloth, felt, and faux fur. It also contains geographical and zoological impossibility: wolves, one of which plays a key role in the narrative, are not native to England and are therefore unnatural in this context, as are the film's mountainous landscapes that the wolf calls home (Kertzer 11). This is not simply England; this is Anderson's England, which is also equally American (and a little French). Like Walden Pond in Thoreau's book, "it appears to be another embodiment of the American moral geography—a native blend of myth and reality" (Marx 245). Owing to its purely constructed diegetic world and its literal puppet characters, *Fantastic Mr Fox* represents the first time that Anderson can completely control every minute aspect of his mise-en-scène. This lends him total freedom to create while paradoxically being resoundingly controlled by his personal obsessions, bowled over by his own genius.

All the while he poses his artifice as artless, a product of his unconscious, or natural, instincts as much as a learned craft. For Thoreau, unconsciousness was lauded as "an equivalent of vision" (Hartman, "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness'" 56), and Anderson's continual disavowal of conscious knowledge of many of his creative decisions helps perpetuate this Romanticised conception of his work and artistic status. As much as the film is about Anderson's own obsessions, though, it has greater cultural resonances. In its treatment of childhood, it exhibits an awareness of Romantic conceptions of "natural origins" and childhood's relationship to both individual and cultural progress.

Little Savages in the Garden: Ash, Kristofferson, and the Ideal Romantic Child

The figure of the child plays a key role in the examination of personal, societal, and cultural origins, or "natural" states, in the film. The Romantic child symbolises these origins, representing the natural human state before it becomes progressively civilised. Rousseau describes this process as a loss of "equilibrium" and argues that in nature, all humans lack pronounced differences that would "make one dependent

on another" (Rousseau 212). For Rousseau, this means that "natural man" was autonomous and therefore truly free. In societal terms, the child was believed to "represent the childhood of the race as a whole" (Rowland 10). This view was the result of "stadial theory", the idea that "human societies […] move through a series of 'stages' or 'states' in an order or pattern that was relatively uniform and stable" (43) and that through the development of one child, we can trace the development of the entire human race.

The child enjoys "special access" to a primitive mode of being, becoming "something of a pioneer who restores these worlds to us […] with a facility or directness which ensures that our own relationship to them is, finally, safe" (Rose 9). We can access these primitive states through the child's innocence and supposed freedom without compromising our privileged civilised status. The children's story is often used to address these ideas, especially since children's fiction is thought to be as much about the liminal space between childhood and adulthood as it is any kind of prescriptive for civilising that childish nature (1). Perhaps surprisingly then, Dahl's book contains no major child characters. (Mr Fox's multiple children are not even named.) But Anderson adds two important child characters to his retelling, Mr Fox's bewildering and confrontational son, Ash, and his sophisticated and gentle nephew, Kristofferson, who comes to live with the family because his own father is suffering a prolonged illness.

As in much of children's fiction, Anderson's child characters are often viewed through an adult lens. This can lead to a simplistic reading of Anderson's attitudes to childhood as coming from a position of nostalgic longing for the naiveté and purity of "innocence" and the child's perceived wildness or closer relationship to nature. However, as Peter Kunze acknowledges, Anderson creates worlds with developmental overlap between children and adults that "blur […] sharp distinctions" between the two (95). It is not so much that his adult characters act like children and his children are preternaturally adult—rather, they exist as a testament to the idea that the linear sense of progress from "childish" to "adult" behaviour is a false, artificial construct (102). There is no sense of reaching a finish line or a clear demarcation point; characters such as Mr Fox exhibit a continual recapitulation of personal development just as the child supposedly recapitulates the entire cultural

progress of humanity. Anderson's adult characters "continually retraverse their own signification, rediscovering it in image while attempting its subsequent co-optation" (Gooch 29). That is, they perpetually recall and recapture their earlier selves in an attempt to construct meaning in their present identities. As a result, personal history (that is, childhood) becomes paramount; "The child is the father of the man" is an Andersonian principle, but Anderson does not deny that the child remains after the man is revealed.

Childhood is not celebrated as a naïve state of innocence in Anderson's films, but instead it is rife with the "danger" that the Romantics acknowledged—his child characters suffer from supposedly adult tribulations, and are often as glum, depressive, confused, and even borderline antisocial as his adults are (Kunze 103), even as they construct hopelessly naïve ideas about what it means to be adult. Wildness remains long after civilisation, and the pressing problems of civilisation infect the presumed "wildness" of childhood. In Anderson's worlds, adults never really lose their childish nature[41] and thus never totally lose their link to the natural world. In a sense, this constitutes a desire to re-attain that Rousseauian equilibrium lost by the civilising process, but its integration always remains a tentative one at best. Mr Fox is part Rousseau's "savage man": "self sufficient […] he felt only his true needs, saw only what he believed he had an interest to see; and his intelligence made no more progress than his vanity" (Rowland 94). He is undoubtedly "subject to strong passions, but also to express those passions more directly" (94). But he is also a charismatic "genius", full of wit and rakish charm, a loveable rogue who is as much capable of following chivalric codes as he is killing a chicken in one bite.

Fantastic Mr Fox's two key child characters, Ash and Kristofferson, represent this dichotomy between wildness and civilisation in the film, and are primarily representative of Mr Fox's struggle between his natural instincts and his societal

[41] Anderson's maternal figures, such as Felicity Fox (but not necessarily other female characters, such as Margot Tenenbaum) are routinely characterised as being practical, steadfast members of the social project. These matriarchal women do not suffer fools gladly—those fools normally constituting the hapless male figures at the centre of Anderson's narratives. Rather, they tend to just get things done, despite having often complicated inner lives. As Adrienne Kertzer notes, an earlier draft of the film's script explicitly points to the hidden darker layers of Mrs Fox, when Bean studies her sublime landscape paintings of thunderstorms and comments, "She's got a good eye, but she's obviously very depressed" (7). Unfortunately, Anderson seems to have far less interest in these characters than he does the egocentric men-children on which his stories focus.

obligations. The differences between the two are obvious and striking, and played for comic effect, as is Ash's jealousy of his much more worldly cousin (figure 4.5). In a sense, their differences are akin to those between the Old World and the New: while Ash attempts to construct a personal identity as hero and crusader based on his "White Cape" superhero comic (complete with a uniform of white cape fashioned from a towel), Kristofferson, who comes from "the other side of the river", is an unassuming, contemplative, well-mannered child with an affinity for yoga, martial arts, and other international/Eastern pursuits. Even his choice of bathing suit, a very European-style Speedo, suggests his more cosmopolitan outlook. His unusual name, which Anderson does not really explain the origins of, evokes an exotic version of Christopher, but also recalls Texas-born singer-songwriter and actor Kris Kristofferson, a paragon of the sensitive artist secure in his quiet masculinity.

Figure 4.5 The strained relationship of Ash and Kristofferson exemplifies the clash between the old world and the new and the two warring sides of Mr Fox's personality.

Despite being younger than Ash, Kristofferson is taller and already the accomplished athlete that Ash insists he is but clearly is not. He quietly excels without fuss, while Ash functions on the level of pure Id, never neglecting to loudly share his frustrated feelings of wanting to be the best despite being, as is often denoted in the film with a characteristic wiggling-armed hand-gesture, "different". Kristofferson, while himself quite alien to the Fox family, seems content to just be,

secure in the knowledge of his talent and morality. Ash is rude, coarse, and infantile, while Kristofferson is polite, genteel, and mature.

If "the 'New World' is also the ancient past, its frontier the place where man's future and origin exist together" (Rowland 45), as in Locke's famous phrase "in the beginning all the World was America" (Locke 18), than Ash represents the New World: a wild child in developmental infancy, eager to prove his worth but yet to find his niche. (Anderson scores Ash's bedroom scenes with more Burl Ives, connecting Mr Fox's revolutionary spirit with that of his son's.) Kristofferson represents the established, worldly, secure, and even complacent outlook of the Old World. It is key that in the narrative's climax the two boys work together to help realise the family's qualified success. Together, they represent the pastoral middle ground, a place where nature and nurture coexist in a benevolent equilibrium.

According to Rowland, the Romantic child historically encompasses these dual states, simultaneously located in the "distant past" of cultural and developmental infancy and the "present and future" through the child's education and eventual enculturation (32). Together, these "two figures" of the child produce "simultaneous ancestor and progeny, past and future, an embodiment of both wisdom and ignorance" (32). Taken as a unit, Ash and Kristofferson form this quintessential Romantic child, serving to help Mr Fox realise his own identity, or "ideal self":

> The 'Romantic Child' has often been seen as central to the delineation of what has been called the 'Romantic self,' that private, interior and natural version of subjectivity, identity and individual growth. […] Representing the ideal self in and through the figure of the child is thus an act of privileging the interior life of feeling and memory as what constitutes the self (26).

As Mr Fox relives his own developmental history through Ash, instead of being "fantastic" he experiences "difference" in the pejorative sense. Ash's artifice is a blatant construct, clumsy and transparent, a cardinal sin for Mr Fox. But while Kristofferson appears to be Mr Fox's ideal on the surface, appealing to his cosmopolitan social pretensions and pose of self-assuredness, he is far too civilised to be so. Kristofferson's more international proclivities, ironically, seem suspect to Mr Fox from the moment he sees his nephew doing yoga, a Zen practice that belies

his lack of the wild spark and subsequent fire that fuels Fox's *raison d'être*. While Mr Fox appreciates Kristofferson's "raw, natural talents" enough to invite him on a farm raid, he only ever really uses those talents as a tool in attaining his own selfish goals.

Ultimately Mr Fox accepts both Kristofferson and Ash, as they form an undeniable bond while attempting to retrieve Mr Fox's shot-off tail from Bean, which creatively communicates their desire to become more integrated and accepted into the familial bonds through action. According to Steven Rybin, Anderson's formations of family are "aesthetic event[s]", largely makeshift communities created by the efforts of characters themselves ("sensitively guarded artists and expert imaginers") who enable these formations through their own creative enterprise (40). In this way these characters are as much metaphors for Anderson and his relationships as they are standalone personalities. The director's older brother, Eric, voices Kristofferson, and Eric has pointed out that the two young foxes' rivalry is quite similar to that of himself and his brother—although the latter, in typical fashion, professes to be unaware of the connection (Kertzer 14).

Ash and Kristofferson could also be construed as identity projections of Anderson's own childhood self, as well as a depiction of this autobiographical sibling relationship. While Mr Fox may be Anderson's ultimate stand-in in the film, Ash and Kristofferson clearly represent not just two sides of warring personal behaviours and ideals to his protagonist, but also to Anderson; their coming together in the bonds of both family and friendship represents a successful personal integration for both main character and auteur. And while the family at the centre of *Fantastic Mr Fox* is more of a traditional nuclear one than in many of Anderson's films, they do form something of a makeshift team with the addition of Kylie and Kristofferson, who, it is pointedly noted, is not related to Mr Fox—the sun at the centre of this familial universe—"by blood".

Likewise, the entire animal community as a whole can be seen as exemplary of what Rybin characterises as "the discovery of new forms of family and community" through the "artistic events" spearheaded by the (paradoxically antisocial) genius of Mr Fox. Together they form a new society out of the cast-offs of their old

civilisation, and in this way recapitulate the discovery and cultural infancy of a "new world"—one full of hope in rebirth despite its relegation to a literal sewer. Like Thoreau before him (in another myth-making turn) Anderson places emphasis on "building the new from old materials" in a symbolic act of renewal and finds "redemption of the ordinary through close attention and exalted imagination" (Fender xxxvi-xliii). In much the same way that *Walden* is a "spiritual autobiography" for Thoreau (xxxviii), so *Fantastic Mr Fox* is for Anderson—he casts himself as the cunning fox driven by his varied, often contradictory predilections, who still manages to create satisfying works of beauty amid roiling chaos.

Figure 4.6 Mr Fox sheds his 9-to-5 persona and embraces his inner troublemaker when he wears his corduroy suit, inspired by Anderson's own wardrobe.

This connection is made explicit by Anderson's physical depiction of his lead character. When Mr Fox is at his "straight" job, he wears a conservative suit and tie; when he is giving into his natural cunning, he wears a mustard-yellow corduroy suit, reportedly fashioned from the same material as a suit Anderson often sports himself, which is prominently featured in the film's promotional materials (Kunze 99) (figure 4.6). The overall optimistic tone of the film, however, does not shrink from

Anderson's typical expressions of melancholy. Here they are exemplified by the necessity of giving up pure animal nature in order to achieve the pastoral ideal.

Mourning the Loss of Animal Nature

The cultural link between animals and childhood, which principally fomented in the eighteenth century, is well documented. Infancy was classified as a "border state […] a human-becoming animal or an animal with hidden human resources" (Rowland 110). According to Rowland, "scenes of children learning to read also become newly significant as enacting another crucial step in the process of becoming human" (110). It is no accident that Ash is seen learning how to navigate the world of adult responsibility through his *White Cape* comic books—almost all children in Anderson's films are linked to the written word, either as fiction authors, letter writers, or obsessive readers. If children are little "savages", they are also animals in the process of becoming human.

All the humanised animals of Anderson's film, not just Ash and Kristofferson, can be taken as avatars for children, albeit ones that not only "cognize, will and effect" (Rowland 113) but grasp their capacity to do so. C. Ryan Knight has drawn attention to Anderson's use of animals in his films generally. He claims that the loss of animals (specifically pets) "marks the point where [Anderson's characters] become ready and able to reconnect with their family and community" (Knight 66). In beholding the animal, a representation of the other, people are able to "better construct identity [and] morality" (66). But what happens when the animals are beholding each other? Romantic studies of human development increasingly questioned the idea of human uniqueness (Rowland 109), even regarding what were once seen as solely human qualities like the capacity for language (121). "The natural and developmental history of language and literature […] assumes man's animal origins and asserts significant continuities, rather than categorical distinctions, between animals and humans" (109). *Fantastic Mr Fox* is not so much about anthropomorphising the animal as it is locating the animal within the human.

Knight regards the animals in the film as indicative of the human struggle between "gentle and loving" civilisation and the "harsh" animal world of instinct (72) with

the conclusion leading to "Fox as committed wholeheartedly to the well-being of those around him" (73). But that conclusion suggests a false dichotomy. As I have hopefully shown, the film is about a search for an aesthetic and ideological middle ground. Mr Fox does learn a lesson, but the lesson is that animal cunning and civilisation (the latter as much stifling as it is "loving") can fit hand in glove if certain compromises are made. And it is difficult to view Mr Fox as losing much of his self-interested egomania by film's end. (In the final scene, he gets up on a literal soapbox to make yet another grandiose speech.) If anything, his natural cunning has allowed him to commit to his social group while still allowing him the spoils of his exploits.

Even the relationship between animal species in the film is complicated by Anderson's aesthetic and narrative choices. While the principal characters in *Mr Fox* clearly function as human avatars, there are animals in the film that are not anthropomorphised, or only vaguely so. If the "sympathetic communication" between humans and animals is "a major topos of Romantic and sentimental literary culture" (Rowland 124), the relation between humans and animals (and non-humanised animals) in the film ranges from unclear to antagonistic, and Anderson himself remains purposefully vague on the subject: "We were always trying to puzzle out how the humans and animals interact. Do the people see that these guys [the animals] are wearing shirts and corduroy suits? I don't know" (Anderson). Mr Fox and his friends are trapped in a sort of "fantastic" (in Todorov's sense) liminal world unto themselves, and their relation to the ordinary world of humans and animals is contested, once again creating an ever-so-slight undercurrent of anxiety for the viewer.

According to Akira Lippit, "In supernatural terms, modernity finds animals lingering the world *undead* (1, his emphasis) in "a society now defined by the disappearance of wildlife from humanity's habitat and by the reappearance of the same in humanity's reflections on itself" (2–3). That is, the animal attains a new abstract cultural significance because it has been mostly erased from everyday presence. It becomes "the very figure of modernity itself" (25–6): "[D]enied the status of conscious objects, animals were now sought as the ideal figures of a destabilized subjectivity" (25). In *Fantastic Mr Fox*, the lone wolf represents this ideal of the

defaced and erased animal. As Anderson suggests, the wolf is "a *real* wild animal" (Anderson),[42] living a harsh, solitary life in the true wilderness, he does not have time for idle conversation or self-indulgent hijinks. The very mention of wolves causes a profound anxiety in Mr Fox ("It's not a phobia, I'm just afraid of them"), as the acknowledgment of true wildness will force him to admit he is of a different kind altogether.

While driving his getaway motorbike, he finally encounters the feared feral creature face to face. When he answers the wolf's raised fist salute in kind (figure 4.7), it is not just an expression of solidarity among animals; it is also an acknowledgement of the wild animal's struggle, which can never be Mr Fox's own.[43] The wolf exemplifies the "lost object" found at the heart of modernity, to be mourned, but not for itself (Lippet 3). According to Lippet, in the modern era the foreignness of the animal reflects on our own sense of self:

> The animal came to inhabit a new topology of its own, and humanity was left to mourn the loss of its former self. *The mourning is for the self*—a self that had become dehumanized in the very process of humanity's becoming-human (Lippet 18, emphasis added).

With the wolf, we return to the Romantic idea of nature holding up a mirror to human consciousness. Animality can function in much the same way as the whole of nature, as a seduction "bring[ing] humanity to the threshold of its subjectivity" through the animal gaze (51). The "lost object" glimpsed in this gaze is not the animal but "the former, pre-egoical self", which "is treated with an ambivalence that frequently takes the form of hostility" (18).

---

[42] To lend a further note of the authentic, Anderson had Bill Murray act out the part of the wolf on a hill at the farm in Connecticut where most of the voice actors recorded their performances. This physical acting out of roles was done throughout recording (Anderson).

[43] In his director's commentary, Anderson notes that this scene was inspired in part by the ending to Sydney Pollack's 1972 western *Jeremiah Johnson*, a New Hollywood ode to the Romantic American myth of the solitary white frontiersman who goes "native" (virtually feral) in the nineteenth-century climes of the Rocky Mountains. Like Anderson, Pollack simultaneously valorises and deflates the myth of the wild as a place to "find" oneself, although he does so much more brutally—caught between town and country, Jeremiah is refused his pastoral middle ground and instead devolves out of necessity into a brutal killer.

For Mr Fox, that projection of ambivalence is directed toward the wolf, just as the farmers direct their hostility toward the fox. The fundamental difference is that Mr Fox comes to terms with his loss, while Boggis, Bunce, and Bean forever spin their mechanised wheels in renunciation of the animal other as a way to deny their own animal origins.

Figure 4.7 Mr Fox acknowledges the struggle of true wildness in his raised-fist salute to the solitary wolf.

The fox, like his creator—and we can safely say he is the creation of Anderson, inspired by Dahl—finds a compromise, a middle ground, in which to pursue his creative goals. M.H. Abrams notes that many Romantic works "turn on the theme of hope and joy and the temptation to abandon all hope and fall into dejection and despair" ("English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" 108). According to Abrams, "Infinite longings are inherent in the human spirit, and […] the gap between the inordinacy of his hope and the limits of possibility is the measure of man's dignity and greatness" (109). The measure of Mr Fox's dignity lies in his spirited ability to find hope even while stuck in a sewer. Rather than wallowing in a mournful, melancholic nostalgia for a disappeared true wildness, the "fantastic" Mr Fox salutes the wild animal (and the wild animal within) and acknowledges his peril. Then he hopefully motors on, the children safely in tow.

Conclusion

Fantastic Mr Fox reaches a tentative yet hopeful conclusion about its protagonist (who serves as Anderson's alter-ego), his creative vision, and the social bonds he forms. However, it also features a tinge of anxious regret for the animal nature now lost to him. What's lost is to be mourned, but not to the point of pathology. After all, what's found—the latent creative genius always dwelling within—can be harnessed for new imaginative, visionary goals. The animal remains hidden in liminal territories, but it has not been "effaced" according to the brutal dualism of a "dialectic of humanism" which subsumes it (Lippet 45). Instead, the animal resides within, in the unconscious recesses of the creative imagination, accessed freely and intuitively and shaped into works of art.

Anderson acknowledges, celebrates, and then mourns this animal nature, but he does so while simultaneously recognising the human ability to synthesise natural impulse, not annihilate it. As such, the loss is an ambivalent one, for it is the source of our greatest power and our deepest regret: the fall from nature. By exploring the cultural and individual recapitulation of the child amidst the "multiplicity" (131) of the natural, animalistic being, Anderson's film asserts the creative vision of the individual as well as celebrates the bonds of the human social project.

The arguments I have been making throughout this thesis contain an implied ethical discourse, which I will engage with explicitly in the final chapter. That discourse is, in essence, an ethics of compromise, but one that leaves room for constant renegotiation of that compromise. The filmmakers themselves take ethical stances by questioning political dogmatism and absolutes through their films, instead favouring highly personal expressions of an ethical relationship between self and world. In *Marie Antoinette*, the titular character expresses such a relationship through an engagement with the ethics of excess, as does the film's director.

V

"It's Not Too Much, Is It?" Keats, Fancy, and the Ethics of Pleasurable Excess in *Marie Antoinette*

O, sweet Fancy! let her loose;
Every thing is spoilt by use
–Keats, "Fancy" (1820)

In her third feature, *Marie Antoinette* (2006), Sofia Coppola engages ethically with her protagonist subject through ambivalent depictions of excess combined with a sympathetic yet distanced aesthetic approach.[44] Typified by the notions of what is considered feminine excess in Rosalind Galt's definition of the ornamental "pretty", Jeffrey Cane Robinson's engagement with the similar excess of "fancy" in Romantic poetics, and Kristin Thompson's notions of cinematic excess, *Marie Antoinette* confronts prevailing notions of "good taste" and masculine propriety. In doing so the film rejects the rationalising discourse of modernism as essentially unethical—before, that is, equivocating somewhat in its final scenes.

Through depictions of voracious pleasure-seeking as an antidote to personal suffering, an engagement with beauty and the external world that veers into a "material sublime" (Keats, *Poems* 237) in the vein of John Keats, a portrayal of romantic love and desire and its relation to consumerism, and the vacillation between a superficial characterisation of its protagonist and an assertion of her intrinsic value, the film asserts a sense of ethics that can be considered "postmodern" (Downing 148). Such a position is not rooted in indifference, but instead in a "questioning of assumptions" that, unlike modernism's rigid proscriptions, is truly proper to the contemporary age (148). The film's breaches of good taste—an aesthetic fascination with surfaces and materiality, a commitment to feminine notions of ornamentation, and a disregard for historical accuracy—are not

[44] I broadly define ethics in this context in its "normative" sense: it functions on the level of the individual as a "guide to life" in a moral framework encompassing "a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons" (Gert and Gert).

just rooted in the impulses of its main character; they are part of the fabric of the film itself.

The film's ethical stance relates to a highly personal, idiosyncratic examination of the alienated individual's relation to society through a Romantic conferring of "value on the insubstantial" (Cane Robinson 20) and a questioning of the "value of limits" (33) as a way of attacking the totalising narrative of modernism. Instead, Coppola's film exhibits what Emma Francis refers to as "weak postmodernism": it "rejects the possibility of discovering universal truth, values or human (or female) essence", instead "making specificity the basis for political engagement" (Francis 71). As a result, the film focuses on personal struggle in the midst of political revolution, not the revolution itself. This is why I have chosen to forgo a more obvious reading of *Marie Antoinette* in relation to that of Romanticism: a historical account of the French Revolution and the Romantic response to it—although I will allude to this throughout the chapter.

The commitment of the "Romantic ethic" (Campbell 173) to individuality and personal self-expression belies the severe judgments often pronounced on a stereotypically feminised aesthetic and excess in general in the Romantic era. These judgments are countered by an alternative mode in Romantic poetics, a style largely defined by its excess and sensuous materiality, one considered immature next to the critically approved model of suffering and maturity found in the Romantic lyrical subject. *Marie Antoinette* is in many ways a film *about* excess, both material excess and the desiring mode that accompanies it, and as such I place it within this alternative Romantic tradition. If the most common reaction to the historical figure of Marie Antoinette can be described as, to use Jeffrey Cane Robinson's term, "fanciphobic" (6), Coppola's revision embraces the fanciful as a subversive feminine aesthetic.

The film's depiction of daydreaming, aesthetic "dreaminess", and material consumption echoes Colin Campbell's notion of "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism" (77) and its relation to the Romantic ethic, including Romantic love. It clearly depicts the ambivalence between the perpetual "desiring mode" (86) that such hedonism elicits and the recuperative effect of an engagement with materiality,

linking pleasure with pain and suffering. While the film's climax abandons fancy to present Marie Antoinette in terms of its opposite—a canonical Romantic "depth" model of personal growth—this neither negates nor repudiates what comes before in the narrative. That the film's aesthetic prettiness is shorn away and replaced with a shadowy, funereal pall can be viewed as much a bleak premonition of modernity as it can a soul-making exercise of democratic sympathy through suffering. Ultimately, Coppola's questioning of masculine hegemony and the value of "soul-making" (Keats, *Letters* 250) registers as largely ambivalent.

The film establishes a sympathetic milieu in which to explore these aesthetic and narrative preoccupations. First and foremost, Coppola chooses to foreground experiences of pleasure and desire through her main character. Such a sympathetic, pleasure-seeking ethos was fundamental to the creation of the Romantic self.

Sympathy, Pleasure, and the Romantic Self

Romantic philosophy is often thought to sacrifice the social (and, as a result, moral) order to the pre-eminence of solitary, individualistic experience. Rousseau—whose well-documented narcissism evinced an abiding fascination with "the distinctive nature of his own self" (Campbell 184)—greatly influenced the Romantics with his assertion of humanity's basic goodness, a goodness which becomes morally twisted by the corruption and suppression of social institutions (186). He insisted that the social order constituted a "sacred right", but one individuals were only "obliged to obey" if its powers were considered "legitimate" and held without force (Rousseau, *The Social Contract* 13), that is, if they were moral in the eyes of the individual and the populace (Bertram 3.3).

But the Romantics were also largely influenced by the stressing of universal sympathy in the philosophy of David Hume. Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751) argues that we make moral judgments not by a "chain of argument and induction" but "by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense" (Hume), or feelings of disinterested moral sentiment rather than reason. He asserts that sympathy belongs to the "innate disposition in all human beings" and leads to the "approv[al] of pleasure or utility wherever it occurs" as well as the universal

condemnation of pain and suffering (Singer 423). Hume defines sympathy in part as "emotional contagion"—a pure communication of affect between persons conferred into an idea by imagination (Stueber). This view allowed the Romantics to embrace feeling, passion, and imagination as a font of moral virtue, and also to bring the Romantic self into sympathetic allegiance with the rest of humanity.

This "innate sympathy" forms the basis of moral behaviour within Hume's philosophy (Singer 395), and implies that the individual's experience of pleasure is as moral as her value to the social order. Unlike Kant, who argued that reason alone predicated morality (394) and derided "merely sensuous enjoyments" (Kant 142), Hume "affirms that kindness, bodily appetite, and the sense of beauty" are virtually inseparable from one another (Singer 426). According to Denise Gigante, "For the Romantics, aesthetic pleasure was constitutive of the human" (Gigante, "Foreword" Xiii). Combining Humean ideas of sympathy and popular eighteenth-century notions of sensibility—as well as a healthy dose of Rousseauian narcissism—Romanticism absorbed pleasure seeking into its ethos, seeing it as an innate moral good (Campbell 177).

The Romantic ethic not only exhibited reverence for emotion, but also a newfound allegiance toward sincerity over propriety (177). As the Romantic was "a person of true sensibility, possessed of a passionate and impetuous nature which would simply not permit dissembling or hypocrisy" (177), this could certainly lead to breaches of good taste. These transgressions were part of their own moral code, one that called for "defiance of convention" (177) as a reaction against bourgeois propriety and conventional morality (194). For the Romantic, taste became an individualistic, spiritual way of seeking truth via the shaping powers of the imagination (182), à la Keats's famous phrase, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (Keats, *Poems* 346).

Ethical in its relation to personal feeling and self-realisation, it refused to conform to the mass-produced "rituals, mores, and institutions" a hypocritical society considered moral or good, and as a result "the person of true sensibility" was bound to be unconventional, an "outsider" (177). As long as this personal conception of taste remained in the realm of the masculine imagination, it was a valid response to the conventional modes of morality that stifled individual freedom.

This didn't stop many Romantic poets and critics from making their own pronouncements on what they considered bad taste. Questions of taste were integral in attempts to tame Romantic attitudes towards "feminine" excess. In his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), Hume posited that only critics possessed with a "strong sense" could make proper judgments of taste by "joint verdict" (Hume 24). This sense was "united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice" (24). According to Hume, the "cultivation" of taste became "a necessary part of […] moral education" (97). This moral education was grounded in the proper response to aesthetics.

In *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), J.C. Friedrich von Schiller considers beauty the very "instrument" of moral education (Schiller I, IX). Schiller's concept of aesthetic education holds that "profound and thoughtful" contemplation of beauty leads one down a moral path (Schellekens 96). Such ideas of beauty and morality informed the critical view of the "low" writings of the Romantic period, especially the sentimental and Gothic novels of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. These works were considered essentially immoral, with their (largely female, or at least feminised) audience characterised as both "mindlessly passive" and "voraciously appetitive" consumers (Newlyn, in Webb 150). The implication is that an excess of sensory pleasure leads to a degeneration of mind, where a "physiological response overwhelms the consuming reader's intellectual powers" (152), reducing the ability to judge good taste from bad and resulting in an anesthetised, passive consumer. This dual idea of passivity and voraciousness both indicates the removal of individual will and reason and links the consumer to the excesses of animalistic, bodily appetites.

Fancy and Its Relation to Ethics and Excess

Chief among these rejections of the aesthetic of low taste was a denigration of fancy in Romantic poetry (Cane Robinson 1). Jeffrey Cane Robinson makes the distinction between a Romantic poetry of the imagination and one of the fancy: "Compared to the Imagination with its muscular, sculptural powers of invention and unification, the Fancy acts superficially, adumbrating the pleasant but inessential features of grace and ornament" (2). This language—"muscular" versus "pleasant", "essential"

versus "ornament"—clearly evokes traditional masculine versus feminine tropes, with femininity emerging as the degenerate loser in the aesthetic battle. The descriptors of imagination also employ the language often used to describe modernism itself, and combined they couch the differences between fancy and imagination as a struggle between reason-infused patriarchal authority and incoherent feminine excess (3).

Fancy, in its relation to a certain strain of Romantic poetry, represents superficial excess, "bent on proliferation, on sheer imagery and association rather than on discursive coherence, on multiplicity rather than unity, or excess rather than control" (6). These ideas evoke sublimity, but crucially sublimity is only accessed by the transcendence of reason via imagination, which rejects the "erotic and sensuous" (6). Cane Robinson insists that this denigration of fancy is wrong-footed and misconstrues much of the project of Romanticism. He argues that, as Romantic art reflected the "politically charged temperament" and critique of social institutions both preceding and following the American and French revolutions, so fancy in Romantic art offered a "politically radical poetics" (1). This poetics was highly "subversive" and "progressive" in its celebration of the "mind's freedom within an oppositional philosophical framework that actively seeks to constrain perception" (2, 4). This sense of the fancy is inextricably linked to perception through the body, which "awaken[s] the conscious mind to a de-familiarized and therefore truer version of a world" (5). Unlike the rigid, "closed forms" of the imagination, fancy is outward looking and inclusive (4).

In these descriptions, there is also a clear connection to Lisa Downing's idea of the questioning of absolutes in postmodern ethics, as opposed to a rigid application of an incontrovertible modernist truth—these "closed forms" are related to modernism's "good forms" (Lyotard 45) of cohesion and clarity. Fancy also operates within the bounds of sensory, bodily materiality that the idealism of the Romantic sublime rejects. Cane Robinson describes some of the key attributes of fancy:

> the disdaining of limits, exploration of the unknown, animation and personification of the world […] the linkage of Fancy and hope and vision, the mingling of pleasure and happiness with the body, the subordination of grief, play as a means of

> encounter with the world, and a youthful, in the sense of renovative, disposition (42).

The politics of fancy in this period is also couched in terms of good versus bad taste (11). Art steeped in fancy, in the eyes of the "cultural police" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has the capacity to morally degrade society through aesthetic means (11). Unlike the sublime aesthetic of imagination, it does not operate "above" the world (4); it revels in its very place within it. It eschews the traditional Romantic model of the authentic self, opting instead for a "restless, unpredictable drive out from the domain of the ego" (14), with "subjective completion […] com[ing] into being at the point of encounter with the world" (15). It is the opposite of an expression of the conservative narcissistic underpinnings of traditional ideas of the Romantic self, which emphasises a "bourgeois subject strong and bounded" defined by "internal integrity" (15), and instead aligns with the concept of the feminine sublime that was discussed in chapter three.

What may be surprising is Cane Robinson's insistence that fancy was not only embraced by women writers of the era as a "subversive" and "playful" poetics (16); it was also celebrated by late-Romantic canonical (male) writers including Byron, Shelley, and Keats, especially those members of a loose group of writers derisively known as the "Cockney School"—an epithet based on disdain for the "lower" classes and their supposed attendant lack of taste. Despite this late-Romantic turn, the argument against fancy continued into the twentieth-century, embraced both by modern art movements and, especially, by early proponents of filmic realism.

Cinematic Excess: Against Realism

Cane Robinson's description of imagination versus fancy in Romantic poetry aligns closely with the masculine versus feminine conflict in visual art, with the masculine asserting supremacy via the "conservative, consoling" (6) aesthetic of the imagination. This aesthetic "favors line and perspective over color and movement" (4). Colour is, like fancy, "dangerous: it is associated with the feelings, with passion, with bliss; it smacks of excess and the uncontrollable" (5). This clearly connects fancy to Rosalind Galt's description of the "pretty" in visual art—in essence, the

pretty is the visual aesthetic of the fancy. Galt recounts the influence of Kantian ideas about beauty and taste on early filmmaking practices, ideas which have endured to the present (Galt, *Pretty* 38). Beauty is associated with "value", whereas the pretty is merely of interest, a frivolous distraction (55).

For Kant, such an interest "spoils the judgement of taste" due to its grounding in pleasure at the expense of reason (Kant 54). In effect, moral good (the value of beauty and taste) is based on conceptions of masculine *dis*interest, not the seduction of feminine "charms and emotions" (54). The "pretty" and pleasure are inextricably linked because they both lead down the path of excess without the moral check of reason. "To be beautiful is to be good, whereas to be pretty is to simply look good", writes Galt (*Pretty* 52). As a result, filmic realism began to embrace depictions of "ugliness" as a true form of beauty, as "a lack of visual appeal is necessary to access the true" (51). This "ugliness" is rooted, in terms of cinematic realism, in an authenticity that is anathema to the ornamental, as it supposedly strips away surface pleasures to reveal the hidden depths within.

Thus, according to Galt, "the modern becomes a central term in aligning the cinematic with the anti-pretty", and this anti-pretty discourse is conveyed via "the language […] of corruption and disease" (63). As well, the discourse of realism places the pretty squarely within the realm of the inauthentic, engaging in "false aesthetics and false reality […] too picturesque, too attractive […] to be either art or life" (61). There is a clear moral implication here, which places "the pretty outside of the discourse of the good" (69). Conversely, realism invokes sublimity in its transcendence of materiality, commitment to "transparency and purity" and "historical refusal of the pleasurable and sensual" (72). In the space of cinematic realism, there is precious little place for play, and even less for pleasure. "The new masculine modern style values the ordinary, profilmic world, but it must also emphasize that this world is pure and lacking feminine excess" (68–69), which by necessity excludes the impure pretty.

Both Cane Robinson and Galt attempt to rehabilitate the image of the fancy/pretty as a subversive counterpoint to this essentialising modernist aesthetic. It is important to note, especially in the context of Coppola, that both the fancy and the pretty are not

necessarily provocations representing complete upheavals of form. According to Cane Robinson, "most Romantic poetry is written in predictable forms […] yet signs of turbulence reside within these structures" (9). These signs of turbulence are similar to what Kristin Thompson sees in depictions of aesthetic excess in the cinema. Thompson defines cinematic excess as "those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces" (54). These aspects constitute aesthetic ruptures in the cohesive elements of the film, which do not "provide an apparent motivation" (55) and thus shift the spectator's focus from the created structures of the film to the image's materiality—to the film as a film (55).

This excess resides in a film's self-conscious expressions of style, but style is not synonymous with excess. Although "a spectator's attention to style might well lead to a noticing of excess" (56), excess contains no characteristic or specific patterns (55). Excess, in essence, is an aberration, "a device [that] has no function beyond offering itself for perceptual play" which is often considered "disturbing" (57). This potential is disturbing because, as Thompson suggests, it defies the classical principle of good art as "unified and as creating a perfect order, beyond that possible in nature" (57). In other words, it removes art from the realm of beauty.

Coppola does not necessarily abandon a reverence for beauty through her commitment to the fancy and the pretty. Her version of stylistic excess is more in tune with what V.F. Perkins calls "aesthetic suspense", which he defines as "an intensification" that is "calculated to arrive at, but not to pass, the edge of absurdity" (Perkins 226)—although at times the film does present aesthetic aberrations that are clearly absurd (such as the notorious, fleeting inclusion of Converse shoes).

Alex Clayton elaborates on Perkins's definition of such suspense, which is itself connected to notions of good and bad taste. Aesthetic suspense "results from the perception that we are only a whisker away from risibility" (212), straddling "the line between aestheticism and naturalism, mystification and cliché, subjective alignment and autonomy of viewpoint" (214). A film that purports to be an objective reproduction of reality is potentially revealed to be a fictional conception of it.

Like Thompson's depictions of general cinematic excess, aesthetic suspense engages the spectator on the level of materiality, inviting her to offer judgment through perception of the filmmaker's choice—what Clayton refers to as "the daring choice that declares itself" (211)—which leads the viewer to experience pleasure through the exercise of that judgment. This suspense can "border on the ludicrous" (213) in its breaches of aesthetic decorum and taste. Not being grounded in any particular set of conventions, it evinces a lack of structural unity in the film as a whole, and its tension resides in whether or not this will "punctur[e] the film's drama and invitation to emotional investment" (209). That is, if the spectator focuses too closely on these self-conscious aesthetic dimensions, the narrative spell is in danger of being broken.

This sense of the ludicrous arises from events that are not dramatically motivated or make sense in the film's diegetic world. Instead, they draw attention to themselves as artistic devices, ruining the effect of narrative immersion and confusing the spectator's sense of emotional engagement. *Marie Antoinette*'s expressions of excess punctuate the film throughout. Like many of the films I have discussed in other chapters, it straddles the line of emotional engagement with the spectator and a self-acknowledged aesthetic absurdity.

Marie Antoinette and the Valuation of Taste

Marie Antoinette (2006) is Coppola's third feature, and her first to be met with a large amount of critical rancour. The *Guardian* decries its "tedious vacuity" (French) and its lack of attention to historical and political detail as an attempt to "remove history's gangrene" (Bradshaw). Even somewhat positive reviews could not resist making digs at the director's supposedly insensitive dismissal of historical realities. According to the BBC, Coppola chooses to highlight "our modern obsession with wealthy blonde bimbos", creating a confection that "mightn't be food for the soul, but […] is a pleasurable sugar rush" (Papamichael). The film's marketing campaign emphasises these candyfloss-and-meringue conceptions; the 2007 British DVD release splashes a pandering quote from *Empire* magazine on its hot pink cover, proclaiming the film "…the ultimate chick flick, a love letter to

cake, Moët, pyjama parties and rampant romps…" The fact that this does not adequately represent Coppola's film is simply beside the point for many detractors; that she could lend a historical narrative ostensibly about life-and-death revolutionary turmoil the mere appearance of frivolity is crime enough.

Just as with the marginalisation of the so-called "chick flick" today, the novel of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was similarly dismissed as seductively feminine and superficial, offering a meal that, while seemingly satisfying to the popular taste, contained little real nourishment (Webb 150). Samantha Webb considers how consumption practices of these novels were couched in metaphors of eating, "both as indicators of aesthetic value and as descriptions of reception practices" (150). These "edible books" were considered "low", "populist", and (according to Wordsworth) "food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites" (149). A direct line between these feminised narrative forms of the eighteenth century and *Marie Antoinette* can be drawn—it has essentially been derided as an edible film, delicious and decadent in its excess but not suitably filling. In some ways, it is a perfect metaphor for a narrative that itself deals with out-of-control, unwholesome consumption.

Addressing Wordsworth's "range of anxieties about the power of representations" in her writing on "The Ruined Cottage", Karen Swann points to these feminised excesses of the literary culture of the early nineteenth century and its link to "popular sensational fiction, feminine characters and plots, and a feminine or feminized audience" (90). Under this rubric, Swann asserts, Wordsworth composed his poem with an eye to straddling popular "feminine narrative machinery" and the far more exalted world of high Romantic poetry, appealing to an "audience whose pleasure it is to exist at a small distance from the captivated feminine heart" (84). In this way he was appropriating, in reflexive fashion, the popular tastes of the day while simultaneously challenging those tastes (93).

With *Marie Antoinette,* Coppola attempts a similar transposition of "high" and "low" (or, more precisely, masculine and feminine) through her aesthetic excessiveness combined with a "small distance" from her subjects—or, as in Clayton's description of aesthetic suspense, a blend of "subjective alignment and

autonomy of viewpoint" (214). She has made a film *about* feminine excess, more specifically the excess of consumption. But while Wordsworth uses the feminised tropes of his time to "entice and reprove" (Swann 93), Coppola presents at a sympathetic remove. It is possible the less-than-glowing critical reception of *Marie Antoinette* can be chalked up to its portrayal of this excessive "feminine heart" at an uncritical distance—not because she is passing judgment on her characters or her audience, but precisely because she is not.

The scholarly response to *Marie Antoinette* takes a more measured, less morally chagrined approach to the film, largely focusing on its discourse on the body, fashion, and anachronism. Heidi Brevik-Zender engages the film's use of fashion via Walter Benjamin's concept of an ahistorical "now time" that is, according to her, the hallmark of modernity (2). Anna Backman Rogers also writes about the film in relation to ahistoricism, specifically through its use of ritual and repetition. Pamela Flores tackles the film from a semiotic perspective, drawing on fashion and the body and its use in image creation. And Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young cover the film's relation to "Third-Wave" feminism and the contemporary prevalence of "chick culture", highlighting the film's sympathetic portrayal of the queen through a depiction of "feminine display as meaningful, rather than simply frivolous" (104).

Richard Rushton invokes the work of Stanley Cavell and the "melodramas of the unknown woman" in relating Marie Antoinette to a "world of 'moral catastrophe'" (114), one that denies her the will to self-determination (124). Rushton, while asserting that the film is an ethical text, downplays the significance of its depictions of excessive consumption (121). However, I believe these sequences are crucial to Marie's construction of self-identity and thus are part of the film's overall ethical stance; while they do not ultimately prove satisfying and soul-making, they represent Marie's desire to construct a feeling of wholeness through pleasurable consumption—a striving for the Kantian good of beauty that inadvertently achieves a state of sublimity through indecorous material excess.

Coppola's retelling of the life story of the French queen, from just before her first appearance at Versailles, at the tender age of fourteen, to her forced exile (skipping the gruesome climax at the guillotine), is indeed more concerned with surface detail

and the day-to-day activities of its subject, largely removed from the political sphere of the French court. But this does not make Coppola's film any less political, even as it represents history as transhistorical anachronism through fashion. Steeped as it is in highly feminine display, whose valorisation can be attributed to feminism's so-called "Third Wave" (Ferriss and Young 104), it also reifies the notion that "the personal is political" that emerged as a radical idea during its "Second Wave" (Hanisch). Nor is Coppola's approach to the waning days of the decadent *ancién regime* a less ethical one as a result of its emphasis on personal history. As the film's star, Kirsten Dunst, phrases it, *Marie Antoinette* is "like a history of feelings rather than a history of facts" (O'Hagan).

Writing from a historian's perspective, Jennifer Milam claims the film not only "question[s] the authority of history" but also deconstructs history completely, "through an insistence upon the authority of individual response and personal imagination" (47). Coppola's film is not interested in didactic modes of instruction. The Romantic doctrine declares that art itself, not instruction or "models of righteousness", can create virtue (Campbell 187) by "sensitizing, purifying and strengthening the feelings" (Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* 330). The film's virtue relies on creating sense impressions of events through a sympathetic, non-judgmental fellow feeling between filmmaker and filmic subject. Even those who didn't warm to the film recognise this "sisterly, unjudging intimacy" (Bradshaw) "uncritically rendered" (French) in a "sympathetic portrait" (Papamichael) of the young queen.

While Philip French considers "uncritically rendered" a negative critique, I argue that Coppola's uncritical stance is the very essence of her ethical approach. As Rosalind Galt points out in her discussion of *Marie Antoinette,* "Unlike much writing on decorative commodity cultures, this discourse on the historical objecthood of the female body strikingly refuses to blame the woman for her out-of-control consumption" (22). Coppola refers to her first three films (*The Virgin Suicides,* 2003's *Lost in Translation,* and *Marie Antoinette*) as a trilogy concerning the experience of growth into womanhood: "[*Marie Antoinette* is] a continuation of the other two films—sort of about a lonely girl in a big hotel or palace or whatever, kind of wandering around, trying to grow up", she tells the *New York Times*

(Hohenadel).[45]

The film can, like *The Virgin Suicides*, be analysed via its aesthetic use of the "pretty"; it similarly asserts a commitment to colour and feminine surface splendour at the expense of a masculine and modernist desire for utilitarian value and reason. Coppola portrays both the sense of freedom and enclosure that materiality brings through surface decoration, framing, performance, and depictions of pleasurable sensation, especially those of sight, taste, and most pointedly touch. It might seem like this preoccupation with materiality and sensory experience goes against the Romantic veneration of the ideal. But in many striking ways, Coppola continues the projects of Keats, whose form of "concrete idealism" (Bate, *Negative Capability* 46) distinguished him from earlier Romantics like the anti-fancy Coleridge in his confinement to the particular and the empirical (38) and his expression of the "pervasive eroticism" underlying Romantic thought (Singer 295).

Keats and Fancy as an Alternative Romantic Discourse

Keats's personal philosophy of "negative capability" (Keats, *Letters* 43) and a reverence for the "material sublime" (*Poems* 237) champions an ethical engagement with material reality at the expense of ego, energetically calling for a "Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" (*Letters* 37). This Keatsian life contains a wish "for *sensory* surfeit, not the grand immateriality" (Winakur Tontplaphol 46) of what he refers to as "the dark void of night" in the 1818 poem "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq." (*Poems* 237). This dark void, in essence, is the Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime" (a phrase Keats himself coined) (*Letters* 157), which emphasises the mind's idealisation of experience at the expense of the concrete. There is a direct contrast, in Keats's vision, between *thinking* and *feeling*—the former abstracts the world; the latter reaches out towards it in sensuous communion.

---

[45] The press likes to emphasise Coppola's use of interjectory filler words such as "um", "like", and "whatever", perhaps to paint a portrait of her as cluelessly grasping and even inconsequential, although these placeholder words do lend a characteristic impressionism and ambiguity to her thoughts. One 2006 *Guardian* article characterises Coppola as a pampered and insolent adolescent not unlike Marie-Antoinette: "Sofia Coppola could easily be a character in one of her own films, a day-dreamy, slightly disconnected but immaculately stylish waif who seems all at sea in a world of extraordinary privilege. She is tiny and speaks quickly and quietly, her sentences sometimes petering out as if from the sheer effort of formulating them" (O'Hagan). The writer goes on to describe Coppola as "like a slightly out-to-lunch teenager" and "sulkily beautiful", and describes her much less accomplished filmmaker brother Roman (who directed the second unit on *Marie Antoinette*) as the "male heir apparent" of the Coppola clan (O'Hagan).

According to Cane Robinson, while Keats's earlier work falls squarely within the tradition of the poetic fancy, it is often critically dismissed as a simple part of the process of maturation along the road to an exhibited scepticism of fancy and an overall "disinterested tragic attitude" (36). However, he points to the assertion of Keats's contemporary, poet and critic Leigh Hunt (the de facto leader of the "Cockney School"), that Keats's poetry "reaches humanity less through the tragic vision and more through the comic vision of energies and sensualities" (143). "At least as much as he gravitates toward the 'depths,' Keats is drawn—in the way of the Fancy—to the surface", Cane Robinson asserts (142). This manifestation of fancy facilitates "poetry of the liberation of body and mind", in part a defiance of the "Western (masculine) lyric" of canonical Romantic poetry (144). According to Lionel Trilling, "The complex of pleasure-sensuality-luxury makes the very fabric of [Keats's] thought" (Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure" 67). This Keatsian combination is readily apparent in Coppola's film, and represents a mode of psycho-social recuperation for its protagonist.

It is Marie's own engagement with pleasurable materiality in an environment that denies her subjectivity and personal freedom that constitutes her campaign against the powers that confine and diminish her, as well as her self-expression as a creative being. In fact, she uses the very tools of fashion to construct and re-construct a sense of identity as a veritable "declaration of independence" (Flores 614). Coppola's film exhibits a reverence for fancy that can be attributed to a subversive desire for pleasure and playfulness, aligning it with a more typically feminised view, derided as "culturally less 'serious'" (Cane Robinson 16). The fancy, according to Cane Robinson, is a "natural poetics" for women, excluded as they are from the traditional space of the masculine ego (16). If it is seen to have a political mission, it is one of "mak[ing] visible […] that which was not seen or heard for itself" (16).

The feminine "voice" within mainstream filmmaking is, of course, a seriously marginalised one in our own time, as much if not more so as a feminine poetics was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[46] As Downing writes in relation to postmodern ethics in the cinema in general, *Marie Antoinette* represents "tantalizing

[46] There is no shortage of statistical and anecdotal evidence to support the conception of a so-called "gender gap" in both Hollywood and European filmmaking. See Lang, Siegel, Cwik.

and plural ethical alternatives to the universalizing […] discourses of modernism" (148). While it makes sense for a high-profile female filmmaker like Coppola to turn to a more traditionally feminine mode of aesthetics in order to assert alternatives to the overwhelming dominance of masculine modernism, it makes her work decidedly vulnerable to attack as being capricious, trivial, and superficial.

Coppola—who adapts her screenplay from the bestselling 2002 biography by Antonia Fraser, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*—manages the feat of taking a woman who was, for the revolutionary, decried as a symbol of the decadent and corrupt old order[47] and turning her into the tragic, grasping heroine of her own highly Romantic *Bildungsroman.* She abandons the genre of the fact-based historical biopic and instead crafts a melodrama (Rushton 114) more interested, like Keats, in a life of emotion and sensation than in settling the historic record. Coppola remarked to Fraser that Fraser's depiction of Marie's story was "the best one […] *full of life*, not a dry historical drama" (Fraser, my emphasis), and this sense of organic "life" is what drives the work of Keats.

For Keats, "Myth and symbol contained more truth than any careful, 'true-to-life' observation and actuality" (Campbell 186), and the same can be said for Coppola's film. It does not represent the "truth" of grand historical narratives so much as embody a sense of what Downing has called being "true to itself" (Downing 150). Throughout the film, an ambivalence remains, one personified by its protagonist. As I will show, in many respects Marie-Antoinette represents an aesthetic and ideological schism: She inhabits the splits between the beautiful and the sublime; the fancy and the imagination; the *ancién regime*'s crumbling aristocratic decadence and the new values of bourgeois democratic individualism; passive consumption and active creativity; and profound suffering and unmitigated pleasure.

---

[47] Vivian R. Gruder examines whether the public attitude toward Marie-Antoinette in the pre-Revolutionary era was actually as derisive as it is now portrayed, or if this idea is itself indicative of revisionist history. While various "scandal" pamphlets on Louis XV and his mistresses, Pompadour and Du Barry, circulated widely during his reign (271-272), according to Gruder, "The young king, and especially the young queen who had so visibly disliked Du Barry, seemed initially to heighten the moral tone of the court" (273). However, she also concedes, "fresh scurrilous gossip quickly circulated against the young royal couple, in particular against the queen" (273). Regardless of the severity or number of actual attacks against Marie-Antoinette's character, she persists as a symbol of decadence and the subject of popular ridicule in the post-Revolutionary imagination.

"Natural's Not in It": Coppola's Narrative and Aesthetic Aims

Coppola's production gained unprecedented access to actual Versailles locations during shooting (Hohenadel), which lends the film a degree of authenticity she nevertheless has no compunction undermining. The film is comprised of four discrete sections: Marie's marriage to the dauphin and struggle to consummate the union and bear a much-needed male heir to the throne; her days of lavish, decadent parties and voracious consumption with a coterie of favourites; her time spent in the relative seclusion of her Petit Trianon country retreat; and the later years on the cusp of revolution, when she comes to accept her place in the court and her ultimate fate. Throughout, Coppola's unique mix of sympathy and objectivity define her narrative as well as aesthetic aims. That Marie's campaign is ultimately unfulfilling and betrays tragic consequences for her own life is, as Galt writes, not a subject of judgment for Coppola. As Cane Robinson argues, fancy's reluctance to render a clear point of view or ego-identification (like Keats's negative capability) lends the reader (or spectator, in this case) the "relative freedom to think—not in a free space designed for contemplation but in the midst of conflict and opposition" (41). The film is rife with such oppositions and conflicts, and thus questionings, both at the level of style and character.

Figure 5.1 Marie's point-of-view of the sneering, sceptical royal court is quickly contrasted with images of her studying herself as object of their gaze.

Early scenes when Marie first arrives at the palace and enters her private apartment are shot from her point-of-view or with the camera tracking from over her shoulder, aligning the spectator's sight with the character's and filmmaker's as she struggles to take in the scene (figure 5.1). Quickly point-of-view shots are juxtaposed with images of Marie on display: she sits in front of her dressing table mirror and unfurls a fan in front of her face, checking her appearance. In the next shot we see her staring out a window contemplatively, and we again see her point of view: the intimidating and overly regimented Versailles gardens in all their formal aesthetic rigour. The contrast between prettified decorative excess and the arch lines and geometric formations in the interior and exterior respectively hint at the aesthetic tightrope Marie must walk in order to be accepted by the court, just as a mix of POV and presentational, self-image-oriented shots speak to her as frightened child and object on display.

Scenes strongly depicting Marie's point of view appear again, such as the wedding scene, and hand-held extreme close-ups on her face are utilised when she breaks down in sobs behind her bedroom door, but Dunst is largely shot from the point of view of an objective spectator, often as one fragile component of mise-en-scène. In a pivotal scene we hear, in voice-over, Marie's mother (Marianne Faithfull) warning her of the negative consequences of not producing an heir before her sister-in-law. Marie stands alone on a palace balcony as the camera zooms out slowly and steadily from medium long shot[48] (figure 5.2). She is framed by massive, wide-open French doors, creating a black void of space that feels as if it could swallow her up. Imposing stone columns box her in on both sides, and the balcony's rails cover her body from the waist down like truncated prison bars. The effect is of the unyielding, crushing weight of expectation and institutional history, Marie objectified by that history, supremely alone. The camera zooms out further until she is but a compositional speck, with additional columns and doors filling the frame. The camera continues to zoom as the scene is cut—implying the limitlessness of this oppressive loneliness.

[48] Such statically composed long takes with slow zooms either in or out appear regularly in Coppola's films, and usually represent a crucial moment of introspection or a psychological turning point on the protagonist's part, such as the silent, lengthy shot of Johnny Marco (Stephen Dorff) being fitted for a prosthetic mask in *Somewhere* (2010).

Figure 5.2 Trapped in a regal prison, Marie-Antoinette is weighed down both by history and expectation.

The opening shot of Coppola's film (figure 5.3) paints a brief scene of the French queen at her most on display, luxuriously relaxed and seemingly complicit in her "too-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 62). Something akin to an *in media res* opening, this scene actually exists outside the diegesis, and operates more like a pure fantasy image. Over the strains of the Gang of Four's 1979 song "Natural's Not in It", Marie appears onscreen in medium-long shot, her eyes closed with her face raised as she reclines on a blue-and-white chaise longue in a parody of a neoclassical pose, such as the one found in Jacques-Louis David's *Portrait of Madame Récamier* (1800). The queen's milieu and costume, however, are anything but neoclassical. Her voluminous hair in her signature *pouf* style with a plumage of giant white feathers consumes much of the top left frame. The space is shallow and planimetric, as if Marie is placed onstage. In the first of plentiful references to the dessert she apocryphally suggests her subjects eat, pink and white cakes flank her in front and behind.

Figure 5.3 The film's first image sets up its discourse on excess regarding both femininity and consumption.

The effect is akin to "Still Life with Queen", a tableau vivant of decadence that reduces Marie to a prop (almost a cake herself). Brevik-Zender calls it "a visual representation of the stereotype of the ruinous female narcissist" (15)—a conventional judgment of the queen that the film ultimately denies. While meticulously composed, it seems garish, indecorous, even infantile. Anachronistically, her maid is dressed in a stock bourgeois "French maid" costume and could have stepped out of a twentieth-century French bedroom farce. There is a tension between constriction, with the fussy fabrics and heavy sense of indolence, and freedom, in its fanciful colours and glimpses of flesh. Its colours speak to a Rococo sense of whimsy, but the precise composition and symmetrical geometric forms evoke the feeling of a pretty prison. Like the girl tableaux shots in *The Virgin Suicides*, it is so ripe with femininity as to be confrontational, but the dreamy delicacy of the previous film is absent.

It becomes clear from this one shot that *Marie Antoinette* will not be a simple retelling of history. According to Brevik-Zender, its transhistorical narrative opts instead for Walter Benjamin's conception of "now time", which "troubles the notion that an accurate representation of history is desirable or even possible" (10–11). Anna Backman Rogers notes that Coppola's "elision of contemporary and historical time" reflects a social order that is "hermetically sealed" and "function[s] like a self-

perpetuating machine running on empty" (88). In a more positive, recuperative sense, its playfulness also clearly aligns it with fancy, which is "not particularly subject to movement through biological or historical time" (Cane Robinson 38). Specifically, it offers a control of time and space similar to what Walter Jackson Bate sees in the work of Keats (*Negative Capability* 19). Purely imaginative, this scene seems to *only* be able to exist within "now" time.

Marie's direct camera address announces a disregard for classical modes of storytelling and defiance of narrative boundaries, or indeed any bounds of good taste and propriety on the part of the film's protagonist and its director. It also underscores Coppola's preoccupation with the gaze. But this is not a gaze that submits to traditional notions of "dominant–submissive logic" (Downing 124) of the camera/spectator and scopophiliac object (Mulvey 59), respectively. Instead, it evokes the idea of Foucault's Panopticon, which adopts a "pan-voyeuristic perspective", asserting the "shared directorial-spectatorial desire" inherent in cinematic practices (Downing 125). Marie-Antoinette is always on display, and always aware of her display. But her gaze also speaks to her own desiring ethos.

Richard Rushton notes that the film's opening song underscores the "unnatural" quality of the Versailles court and Marie's difficulty in dealing with all that denies her "responses, attitudes and instincts" (117). I would also argue that the song immediately cues Coppola's own artistic aims; there is as little of the natural in *Marie Antoinette* as there is in the rigid, nonsensical social constrictions of Versailles. In this way Coppola's film also questions the claim of discovering truth through filmic realism. By highlighting the constructed nature of its images it counteracts the subgenre of what Jennifer Milam refers to as "realist history", films which attempt "to convince the viewer that they have successfully recreated the total historical space" in their mise-en-scène and "assume that the truth of history lies in its surfaces" (49). Somewhat counter-intuitively, by drawing attention to those surfaces Coppola's film exposes them for what they are: personal, imaginative recreation, and not historical truth. Such recreations invariably take on a subjective cast, one based on the individual desires of its protagonist and her relation to a "material sublime".

Marie Antoinette and the "Material Sublime"

The title of one of Coppola's first films, the 1998 short "Lick the Star", recalls a line from Keats's poem *Lamia*.[49] The line in question occurs in a stanza describing, in sublime fashion, the colourful and cosmic appearance of the titular demigoddess:

> And, as the lava ravishes the mead,
> Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
> Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
> Eclips'd her crescents, and *lick'd up her stars*
> (*Poems* 418, emphasis added)

This poem offers a variety of ways in which to decipher *Marie Antoinette*'s relation to both materiality and the body, particularly the female body. Barbara Schapiro claims that the women in Keats's poems had "ambivalent character" (33), and Lamia is certainly no exception (although she is not actually a human woman, she takes the form of one). While Keats depicts Lamia as something of a monster in her personification of excess, he also exhibits sympathy for his character and takes pains to depict her point of view. Keats's treatment of Lamia is not unlike Coppola's treatment of Marie, which utilises a combination of sympathy and objectivity. Likewise, Keats's depictions of excess and monstrosity align closely with the various ways both Marie-Antoinette and the mise-en-scène are depicted in the film.

Betsy Winakur Tontplaphol describes how *Lamia* supports a conception of the sublime that is sourced in material excess. "In Lamia, Keats embraces materio-sensory engorgement as the purest, if most difficult to sustain, experience of pleasure", she writes (43). Crucially, that excess is found within a delimited space for Keats. While the poet championed "sense-gratifying stimuli" and material pleasure (41), he also strove for a "*tension* between container and contained" (42, her emphasis), depicting material excess within smaller environments rather than

[49] It should be noted that the film's title explicitly relates to the sensationalist 1979 novel *Flowers in the Attic* by V.C. Andrews, a modern Gothic tale involving incest and abuse. In Coppola's film teenage girls obsessed with the story and its instance of attempted murder via rat poison alter the phrase "Kill the rats" into its mirror image, "Lick the star". The novel's subject matter aligns closely with the Gothic fiction that Coppola invokes in *The Virgin Suicides* with its themes of sexual repression and familial oppression. It is also a very obvious example of the "women's fiction" that Wordsworth and his contemporaries would likely deride as frivolous, superficial, and dangerously feminine.

ones distinguished by grandeur (40). This leads to an "indecorous" aesthetic Winakur Tontplaphol characterises as the "cornerstone of Keatsian pleasure", a pleasure than exists in material sublimity rather than picturesque composure (42). It might seem counterintuitive to place the imposing grandeur of the grand Baroque Palace of Versailles in the context of Keats's love of the "Spenserian bower" (41), but Coppola's film sets out to delimit space in a way that not only defines the palace as a literal prison but as the site of Marie's construction of a "rich cocoon" (56) not unlike the one mythical demigoddess Lamia seeks to create.

The film's second act contains the most obvious depictions of material excess and a Keatsian obsession with "creature-pleasures" (Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure" 67). Having become the subject of ridicule for being unable to get pregnant, Marie-Antoinette drowns her sorrows by swimming in yards of the finest French silk, indulging in the most expensive Champagne, and commissioning the highest and most outrageous powdered wigs ever constructed. The sequence that has drawn the most critical attention, a shopping-and-eating montage set to Bow Wow Wow's 1980s nod to sugary pleasures (including sex), "I Want Candy", flaunts Marie and her friends' frivolous descent into a debauchery of material excess—a cornucopia of dresses, expensive fabrics and embroidery, accessories, and most especially shoes flit by onscreen in quick cuts emphasising the fleeting nature of consumption and the need to fulfil new and greater material desires to maintain previous levels of pleasure (figure 5.4).

"It is clear that Marie Antoinette wants something more than candy, and the film uses this metaphor to show that the discursive performance is focused on *wanting* not *doing"*, writes Pamela Flores (615, her emphasis). Coppola depicts this desire by the repetitive grasping found in graphically matching shots. Marie's arms reach into frame to pick up a pair of pastel high-heeled slippers (designed by modern couture label Manolo Blahnik), and a moment later we see her reach into frame again for a different pair via jump cut. The shoes are reconfigured in various bird's-eye-view images, with jumps lending an artificial movement akin to stop-motion animation, making it seem as if they are imbued with organic life.

Again there is blatant anachronism, this time in the form of the controversial addition of twentieth-century-designed Converse athletic shoes, which also emphasise the mix of "high" and "low" culture when contrasted with the expensive designer shoes. Fashion itself, as Brevik-Zender writes, is a "transhistorical" depiction of now time (5), as it "draws from the past even as it looks to the future in its representation of the present" (3). According to Flores, fashion creates a rupture, "which frees individuality, replaces the primacy of past mythical times with an ephemeral present, and turns change into a social value" (614). Coppola's use of fashion anachronisms embellishes this idea of the film as transhistorical, and also points to such social value. It also conjures the mental freedom of fancy in allowing a "new" view of the world through both "contemplation" and "construction" (Cane Robinson 21). This newness writes over the past as it looks with desire toward an ever-unfolding future.

Figure 5.4 The "I Want Candy" montage sequence links pleasurable consumption to fleeting desire, historical anachronism, and the female body.

Other objects, including food, are integral to the film's depictions of consumption. Ladies gorge themselves on ornate pastel cakes and pastries, some of which are so large they can barely fit in their mouths—Brevik-Zender references their visual similarity to breasts (24), linking them to a commodified and consumed female body. Even gambling chips resemble iced pink biscuits. Amidst the dizzying array of artfully composed still-life-in-action shots of desserts and shoes, the soundtrack becomes momentarily dissonant, as if signalling an increasing vertigo brought on by such sensory overabundance—it is too much to take in for the spectator, and even for the film itself. The sequence ends with Marie being fitted with a new outrageously ornate *pouf* wig complete with miniature artificial birds. She turns to her stylist, known simply as Léonard, and asks him guilelessly, "It's not too much, is it?"

Of course it *is* too much, and that is the point. In contrast to the glares and snickers she receives during long solitary walks down the palace corridors, where spiteful courtiers whisper nasty epithets and gossip about the queen within her earshot, in her fantasia of pleasurable consumption, ecstatic delight and positive feelings dominate. Members of the court call her frigid, an "Austrian spy", and outright challenge her, "Give us an heir!" But her affective connections through consumption are another story. "I love your hair; what's going on there?" Marie asks a lady-in-waiting. "Everything", she replies with a friendly laugh.

At first sartorial composure serves as a mode of ranking the ladies of the court—exceeding the boundaries of good taste is proof you are a scandalous whore, such as in the case of the Louis XV's consort, Madame Du Barry (Asia Argento). Her emerald- and ruby-hued dresses (in reality, much more historically accurate than Marie's pastel-hued frocks) (Weber 149) and lack of general restraint are a cause for derision amongst Marie and her group. Marie even refuses to talk with her despite the urgings of Ambassador Mercy (Steve Coogan). "Do you think she's wearing enough jewellery?" she snipes in Du Barry's direction, in what seems a concerted attempt to blend in with the gossiping hordes. Later, when Mercy tells her Du Barry would like to present her with diamonds, she scoffs and tells him she has quite enough already.

Later, however, Marie grows to embrace a too-much-is-never-enough ethos. Caroline Weber describes how the real Marie-Antoinette used her sartorial choices to set fashion trends among the aristocracy and even the growing middle classes (5), using fashion to exert "an appearance of political credit" to make up for her failure to conceive (4). Coppola, however, does not appear interested in the idea of Marie cannily using her outrageous fashion choices to gain political credit—they are portrayed much more as motivated out of desire for decorative beauty, a cocoon of excess and pleasurable affirmation during her confinement.

Her obsession with material excess becomes, in fact, a way for her to transport herself, a sublime experience that temporarily negates her earthly suffering. However, if "deployments of power are directly connected to the body—to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations and pleasures" (Foucault 151–152), these sartorial excesses are connected to Marie's unconscious attempts to wield power in the only way afforded to her. In effect, her bad taste and breaches of aesthetic decorum though choices Weber notes were "better suited to a king's mistress than to a king's wife" become a symbol of "unbridled female acquisitiveness" (Weber 119). In this way they can be seen as a subversive political act, however unconsciously portrayed.

Lamia, fearing the revelation of her inhumanity, fashions a "barely containable […] opulent jumble" of materiality in the small space of her wedding banquet as a form of psychic armour (Winakur Tontplaphol 55–6). Many of the film's depictions of materialist excess take place in Marie's rooms, away from the public eye, which function as a space where she is free to create herself in her own image. While Keats embraces "materio-sensory engorgement" as the "purest" form of pleasure, he also acknowledges it as the most difficult form to sustain (43). According to Winakur Tontplaphol, "Keats questions the pleasure of limitlessness—and, as a result, the value of limitless pleasure" (49). The sublimity of Versailles is rooted in this sense of limitlessness—not necessarily in the edifice itself, but in the supposedly divine institution it represents, the monarchy and the state. Marie's sublimity is rooted in her attempts to achieve transcendence based in something far less ideal, by carving out smaller spaces within which to express her desire for pleasurable, sensuous excess.

When Marie's pleasurable sugar rush begins to give her headaches, she usually retreats to her private apartments. At times these smaller spaces also represent a desire for picturesque unity, betraying a subconscious recognition that sublime limitlessness conveys as much pain as pleasure. Coppola frames Marie ensconced in the womblike comfort of her daybed in the small sitting room off her bedroom (complete with "secret" door, which imbues it with a certain mystery that would intrigue most any adolescent girl). In one brief scene she is dressed only in a post-bath towel, her hair loose and natural and her legs tucked underneath her as she lies in the foetal position. The room's accent colour is the same icy blue from the opening scene, a colour that becomes something of Marie's signature from the time she leaves Austria behind and exchanges her pale yellow frock for an ornate blue gown. It comes to represent a shoring up of her defences, just as pink signifies her desire for pleasure and sensuous abandon. (Not coincidentally, perhaps, Fraser reveals that Coppola's personal stationery is of the same pale blue, a "good Marie Antoinette color!") This cocooning fosters a sense of psychological wellbeing within Marie, but it is also insidiously anesthetising.

In a letter to J.H. Reynolds from 1818, Keats compares the totality of a human life to a "Mansion of Many Apartments" (Keats, *Letters* 95). (Coppola reconfigures this idea into the aforementioned "big hotel or palace".) Applying Keats's metaphor to Versailles specifically, Marie's "small private apartments, surrounded by her fabrics and trinkets" (Coppola) represent an intoxicating "Chamber of Maiden Thought" in which "we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight" (*Letters* 95). Literally a maiden chamber at the point when Marie has yet to consummate her marriage, this is the realm of the fanciful dreamer, an initial, unsophisticated phase that comes before "convincing ones' nerves that the World is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression" (95).

Coppola purposefully depicts these rooms as the site of Marie's daydreaming. When she is overcome by heroic battlefield fantasies of her soldier lover, Count Fersen (Jamie Dornan), in full "proto-Napoleonic" pose on his steed (Bradshaw), she excuses herself from her husband and members of the court to flee down the cold,

imposing palace hallways, a literal depiction of Keats's "dark passages", which function as a recurring motif of isolation and loneliness in the film (figure 5.5). Running quickly and daintily with staccato baby steps through these passages, escaping what they represent, she enters her bedroom and collapses onto the bed, smiling wanly as if in a narcotic stupor as she fantasises about her lover. Such daydreaming also relates to fancy—it is no coincidence that in the nineteenth century, the word *fancier* was synonymous with *dreamer* (Cane Robinson 10).

Figure 5.5 The palace's grand hallways are a visual symbol of Marie's isolation and societal alienation, which she seeks to escape via daydream.

The "Romantic Ethic", Daydreaming, and Modern Consumption

Marie is an archetypal Romantic daydreamer, epitomising what Colin Campbell refers to as "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism" (77). Campbell asserts that modern hedonistic practices, inspired by Romantic ideas, are directly linked to daydreaming, which makes "desiring itself a pleasurable activity" (86). In other words, pleasure does not derive so much from the fulfilment of one's desire, but from the imaginative depiction of that fulfilment. In this way, the modern imaginative hedonist lives in the realm of anticipation, which results in a

"permanent unfocused dissatisfaction" and generalised "longing" that often in itself has no object (87).

This longing combines pleasure and pain in a way indicative of the Romantic persona as it "maximizes the opportunities for indulging in emotions of grief, sorrow, nostalgia, and, of course, self-pity" (88). It also results in the constant desire for the pleasures of the new and novel (86), rather than a traditional hedonistic pattern of pleasure seeking found in those experiences already known to guarantee pleasurable satisfaction (85). This is the "spirit of modern consumerism" that Marie personifies: she is constantly looking for new ways to reinvent herself and her surroundings through experimentation, one driven by her "self-illusory" (89) idealisations and imaginings.

While Coppola only depicts this one act of daydreaming in the film, the tone she creates—one of soft-focus dreaminess combined with outrageous fantasy depictions in the general mise-en-scène—contribute to the idea of idealised materiality and desire, a combination of the pleasures of the material and the fantasy that enables them. Early on in the film a sense of anticipatory desire is established when Marie and her young friends giggle girlishly over a locket image of her soon-to-be-husband (Jason Schwartzman) before they ever meet. This is paralleled with a similar scene, in long shot, of Louis and his brothers discussing Marie's reported beauty, but Coppola foregrounds Marie's desire much more so than Louis's in these two moments.

The entire film can even be characterised as the depiction of the daydream, directed at the spectator. Campbell writes, "imaginative enjoyment of products and services is a crucial part of contemporary consumerism […] revealed by the important place occupied in our culture by representations of products rather than products themselves (92). This is what is being emphasised by many of those critical of the film: the fantastical depictions of consumption and the fetishistic nature of products on display contributes to the seemingly shallow, "materialistic" cultural emphasis on excess and avarice.

However, Marie is not only depicted as a greedy consumer of goods and services; she is also loosely depicted as a Romantic artist. Coppola has remarked that she finds her protagonist to be "a very creative person" (Fraser, Kennedy). Her spontaneity and the intensity of her emotions recall the Romantic self, just as her "embodied imaginings" (Campbell 193) (her costumes and cosmetics) share her pleasure with those around her. At the same time, her breaches of court etiquette, her excess and vulgarity, draw scorn and political fire. But the more scorn she receives, the more Marie doubles down on her pleasurable image creation.

In accordance with self-illusory hedonism, she is "an artist of the imagination" (78). Her joie di vivre and creative impulse speak to the "high moral purpose" the Romantics found in pleasure—a so-called "radical pleasure" for its own sake that could be considered the "defining attribute of life" (191–192). While Wordsworth located pleasure in feelings of "virtue", the later Romantics widened ideas of pleasure to include even those typically associated with pain and vice, including "pride, fear, horror, jealousy and hatred" (192). Coppola depicts Marie's wide-ranging capacity to experience pleasure in her evident delight at mistreating Du Barry, and even her mischievous giggles over her sexual portrayals in revolutionary pamphlets. The later Romantics also recognised the essentially fleeting nature of pleasure, its "elusive and self-extinguishing character" (192). Coppola's narrative explores the darker side of Romantic longing and desire. It depicts the relentless grasping of the new as a mode of diminishing returns and ultimately an idealistic trap in the ever-present illusory web of desire.

Caroline Weber characterises Count Fersen as the "great love" of Marie-Antoinette's life (136), but Coppola's film depicts him more as the object of girlish infatuation, an example of Marie's obsession with novelty, fantasy, and desire itself. He becomes fuel for her on-going fantasies of sexual intrigue, but Coppola's narrative drops this romantic subplot abruptly and without fanfare. According to Campbell, "The cycle of desire-acquisition-use-disillusionment-renewed-desire is a general feature of modern hedonism, and applies to romantic interpersonal relationships" (90). Once again, fancy plays a role in its "projection of an idealized beloved" (Cane Robinson 12) and its ability to move beyond ordinary consciousness in order to embrace love's "extravagance" (12). The beginning of Marie and

Fersen's relationship is portrayed as one of sexual fervour. When Marie meets the soldier for the first time at the masked ball, where she is "disguised" by semi-transparent black lace over her eyes, he represents a specular object of desire for both her and the audience. Coppola shoots from Marie's point of view as she spies the handsome count from across the room. Her early-morning return home after their meeting is scored to an almost frantic version of "Fool Rush In" (with its lyrics "When we met/ I felt my life begin"), signifying her newfound enchantment.

According to Irving Singer, in the eighteenth century the idea of Romantic love as representing a "merging" becomes increasingly crucial (290). This merging is defined as "a metaphysical craving for unity, for oneness that eliminates all sense of separation between man and his environment, between one person and another, and within each individual" (288). In a sense, it is an attempt at ego obliteration, but it is also, ironically, narcissistic. The Romantic lover also found "the experience of love meant more to him than the attributes of any specific object" (292). As Marie had yet to experience love and sex in her celibate marriage, in the film Fersen represents little more than a Romantic fixation, a craving for the new experience, and is ultimately depicted as a component of Marie's imaginative narcissism. The nature of the object of desire is one of diminishing returns to the modern hedonist. It "becomes less and less imperfect as we progressively, and successfully, merge with it" (295). Coppola discards Fersen from the narrative not out of malice or contempt, but simply because his disposability is paramount to the idea of illusory consumption.

Coppola's depiction of Marie during her daydream is suitably ambiguous. Despite her pleasurable, imaginative reverie, she still appears artificially positioned for the camera. She gives a look that almost imperceptibly fails to make a direct camera address, as she lies with her mouth slightly open, her hands resting limp-wristed on her chest in a pose of supplication. The scene implies both pleasure and suffering, and the incongruity between her subjective fantasies and objective reality expresses Marie's inability to escape a bodily commodification even in isolation. As Flores writes, she is "conscious of being always observed" (610), and that even applies to when she is alone, being observed by the camera. Marie's daydream of Fersen is curiously violent and hyper-masculine—his face dirtied in battle amidst a fiery

backdrop of war—and hints at something darker than mere childish infatuation. While it implies the notion of sexual power, it also hints at the "merging" of Romantic love as a danger to personal identity.

Rushton suggests that the foregrounding of "those processes of disconnection between the subjective and the social" asserts *Marie Antoinette*'s ethical stakes and their relation to democracy and self-determination (124). **"**[M]odern democracy goes hand-in-hand with the invention of modern subjectivity and the quest for self-reliance", he writes (126). Rather than a purely narcissistic pursuit, this quest leads to a "constant questioning of the self" which goes "hand-in-hand with, and cannot be dissociated from, the questioning of the society one finds oneself in and the 'place' where one finds oneself in that society" (126). Just as the Romantics' response to being "dulled by their experience of modern living" was "to redouble their efforts as artists" (Campbell 186, 187), so Marie's various attempts to "discover" herself through creative expression align with her desire to more fully enter the social world, even though she has little true understanding of that world or her place in it.

Claude Lefort cautions that self-determination within democracy can by its very essence lead to indeterminacy (303). In a society that has become a "theatre of an uncontrollable adventure" with the removal of the head of the body politic (that of the king), this "dis-incorporation" (303) (in the case of Marie-Antoinette, a literal beheading) leads to a grasping for meaning when identity is "constantly open to question" (304). This is not a picture of the "bourgeois subject strong and bounded, defined by strict forms and a notion of 'internal' integrity" that the Romantic lyric is meant to represent (Cane Robinson 15). Campbell describes the "two most critical" political events of the Romantic period as the twin revolutions, first in America and then France, which represent one "single upheaval by which the middle classes displaced the aristocracy as the leading socio-economic grouping of modern society" (178). Greeted initially with excitement and zeal by the Romantics, a period of "disillusionment" follows the French Revolution, as well as burgeoning divisions within the bourgeoisie itself (178).

Second-generation Romantic poets such as Keats could not escape such class divisions, which also occurred in Britain, and were in part responsible for the

denigrations of his more radical politics and fanciful poetics—in the August 1818 issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* for instance, conservative John Gibson Lockhart (writing under the pseudonym "Z") decried "Johnny" Keats's work as "worthless and affected" and lamented the "purest, the loftiest, and […] most classical living English poets joined together in the same compliment with the meanest, the filthiest, and the most vulgar of Cockney poetasters" (519). Despite the revolution, or perhaps because of it, questions of taste became complicated by and inextricable with class. Instead of the middle class being pitted against nobility, it became pitted against itself.

Figure 5.6 Marie's desire for a more natural, picturesque existence puts her at odds with her need for more "radical" pleasures, as evidenced by her pink hair.

Marie embodies this notion of ever-changing identity and a precarious position within society. Indeed, this indeterminacy goes hand in hand with the elision of historical time in Coppola's film and speaks to Marie's modern obsession with the consumption of the new and novel. She is as much a victim of modernity as she is a victim of the increasingly outmoded ideology of the monarchy. If "grasping the latest little thing […] guarantees the death of the past and the fullness or splendour of the present" (Lefort 234), its enjoyment is perfunctory because it is attached to a desire for more newness in an anticipated future. Keats himself encapsulates the idea of pain in fleeting pleasure in "Ode to Melancholy" when he writes, "And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu" (*Poems* 349). Marie's on-going

exploration of identity, restlessness, and desire is further described by the film's sequence at the Petit Trianon "country" estate, which in reality is located only a short distance away from the main palace.

The film does not shy away from depicting Petit Trianon as an artificial construct even as it sympathetically acknowledges the ethical project of "the discovery of a life aris[ing] from the determination to 'explore oneself'" (Rushton 122). Marie instructs her dressmakers to construct costumes that are "more natural", but soon she appears with her hair coloured Easter-egg pink (figure 5.6). Lionel Trilling divides two distinct "moral ambiances" of the Romantic pleasure-seeking movement of the eighteenth century, the first being the "unexceptional", "innocent", and "domestic" pleasure, and the second of a more "radical aspect" (Trilling 63–64), that of the morally suspect voluptuary. Try as she might to align herself with the simple picturesque pleasures of hearth and home, Marie prefers "unfavourable" pleasure: "sensuous enjoyment as a chief object of life, or end, in itself" (63). This is indeed the revolutionary late-Romantic conception, where such a "primitive" and "radical" pleasure is "directly associated with virtue" (Campbell 191).

According to Campbell, a failure to experience pleasure of such a kind indicates an "alienation from nature […] aris[ing] from the fact that 'the world' is too much" (191). Marie's imaginative hedonism, in fact, exemplifies her lack of alienation from the material world. Despite her desire to delight guests with "pastoral charm" and "neoclassical restraint" (Weber 134), her desire for personal creative inscription on her own body and for the more "radical" elements of pleasure seeking cannot be contained.

The delight Marie feels in material pleasures extends to her entire clique of fellow proto-Bohemian sensualists. During one dinner party, the Duchesse de Polignac (Rose Byrne) shows the other guests how to play a musical game on their glasses. "Lick your finger and rub it around the rim of the glass", she instructs, and they are all charmed by the resulting tones. In many such scenes, Coppola emphasises touch, both of the material (Fersen grabs Marie's bare arm at the masked ball when they first meet; Marie drags her hand slowly through the water as she floats lazily on a small boat in a placid pond) and the more ideal.

As Marie rides home from the masked ball at sunrise, she extends her arm outside the coach and moves it with the motion of a gentle wave, as if grasping for, or creating in her mind, something pleasurable to touch.[50] Here Coppola renders concrete "the eternally forward-flung, and always inaccessible, nature of desire" (Downing 138). As Keats "all[ied] his sensory images more closely with the sense of touch" to make them "stronger and more concrete" (Bate, *Negative Capability* 50), Coppola often conforms her concrete filmic imagery to the ephemeral and imaginary, to what is not there or cannot be seen, only daydreamed.

Figure 5.7 Coppola emphasises the power of touch in much of her imagery, which alludes to both sensual interconnection and the eternal grasping emanating from desire.

Keats's close friend, the poet Leigh Hunt, describes *Lamia*'s couplets as "tak[ing] pleasure in the progress of their own beauty, like sea-nymphs luxuriating through the water" (Hunt xxxviii). In the film a literal body of water represents this luxurious, wandering consciousness (figure 5.7). If "there also appears to be something intrinsically rhythmic or wave-like about the patterns which yield pleasure" (Campbell 64), the wave-like motion of Marie's outstretched arm conjures the idea of the endless waxing and waning cycles of desire. Desire is not just

[50] Coppola uses the same imagery in *The Virgin Suicides*, when Lux (also played by Dunst) reaches her hand outside an open car window in a fantasy sequence, enjoying the moving breeze. Lux is also tellingly characterised by her therapist as being a "dreamer" and "completely out of touch with reality", criticisms that could certainly be applied to Marie-Antoinette.

depicted by Marie's idealised grasping, however, it is also inscribed on her body in the way it is presented and perceived by others and used as a political pawn.

"Like a Little Piece of Cake": The Body, Consumption, and Moral Utility

As in Keats's *Lamia,* material sublimity in Coppola's film is depicted not just in its titular figure's surroundings, but also on her very body. Denise Gigante explains that in the Romantic era, linking the body with sublime excess created a new conception of "monstrosity" as "too much life":

> Such monstrosity does not remain at the level of theory but becomes the motivation for a new kind of monster in the literature of the Romantic period, one whose life force is too big for the matter containing it ("Monster in the Rainbow" 434).

Winakur Tontplaphol continues this line of thought when she asserts, "Lamia's body is not balanced, proportionate, or decorous […] she embodies the congestion intrinsic to Keats's material sublime" (50). At various points in the narrative, Marie's body is seen as the site of similar "monstrous" excess. Her *pouf* wigs, which are indeed historically accurate (Weber 5), recall the iconic hairstyle of the titular victim-monster in James Whale's 1935 film *Bride of Frankenstein*. (The real Marie-Antoinette's wigs perhaps even helped inspire Whale's character design.) The *pouf* was not only an infinitely customisable way to assert individuality, "as part of Marie Antoinette's subjective strategy, the *pouf w*as another device to recuperate her own body" (Flores 617). In Coppola's film, Marie's hair takes on a disruptive, phallic power as it reaches ever-newer heights. This Frankenstein-like "monstrous" excess is alluded to in the film during its climax, when Marie emerges onto her balcony in front of a protesting mob, which literally wields pitchforks and fiery torches as the angry villagers do in Whale's film.

Depictions of Marie as monster are exclusively portrayed from the perspective of the body politic: from the pamphlets claiming she is sexually immoral (either she is a voracious lesbian or has sexual designs on Thomas Jefferson) to the non-diegetic image of her luxuriating in a bath, *pouf* ascending, while scoffing "Let them eat cake" through an incongruous slash of black lipstick (figure 5.8). Absurdly, in this

scene she also wears a diamond necklace, which alludes to the infamous "affair of the diamond necklace" scandal that negatively impacted the queen in the court of public opinion and even helped sow the seeds of revolution (Ferriss and Young 107). This scene represents the wearing of masks, as the costume ball scene does literally, and her conscription into the role of "an object for the other in a play of Symbolic and Imaginary forces" (Downing 136), a sort of femme fatale in the eyes of the people.

Figure 5.8 The infamous (and apocryphal) line "Let them eat cake" is delivered as a horror-fantasy of the body politic, with Marie as its femme fatale.

In *Lamia*, Keats creates a tragic-comic excessiveness that renders the text "generically unstable" with an "aesthetic defined by mismatch, in a narrative driven by its heroine's indecorous desire to cultivate gargantuan sensations in tiny pastures" (Winakur Tontplaphol 57). Coppola creates a similar tragi-comic effect with a tonal mix of straight-faced satire, soporific interludes, and depictions of outright suffering. "To suggest that Lamia's story is a series of bulges, tears, and attempted repairs, is, perhaps, to highlight potentially comic elements", writes Winakur Tontplaphol (57), and such elements are all over Coppola's film. Excess is lampooned in many scenes: during a party, wigmaker Léonard discreetly extinguishes a candle to keep Marie's *pouf* from catching on fire; her partner in crime Duchesse de Polignac appears, in a comic anachronism, to snort cocaine off the back of her own hand; and when Mercy briefs Marie about an important foreign

policy issue, she is too absorbed in whether her sleeve should be made with ruffles or without to pay attention. When she is informed her overspending has left little funds for charity, she resolutely proclaims that only the "smaller" trees be installed on a garden path, as if this gesture will somehow mitigate the poverty of the French people.

On a personal level, Marie's very existence could be considered a series of "attempted repairs" of the miserable state in which she finds herself. As in Lamia's attempts to "retain integrity" by preserving "both corporeal and psychic wholeness" (58), these attempts are ultimately tragically unsustainable (57). Direct depictions of tragedy or violence are rare in the film, resulting in the feeling of anticipatory dread. The death of Marie's youngest child is portrayed by its removal from a family portrait; the angry mob is heard primarily off-screen; and the raid on the palace is exemplified by a simple shot of the ruined royal bedroom, furniture and broken glass strewn about. A bird is heard fluttering its wings but is not seen within the frame, emphasising the static, painterly quality of the shot as it alludes to nature's reclamation of the artificial (figure 5.9).

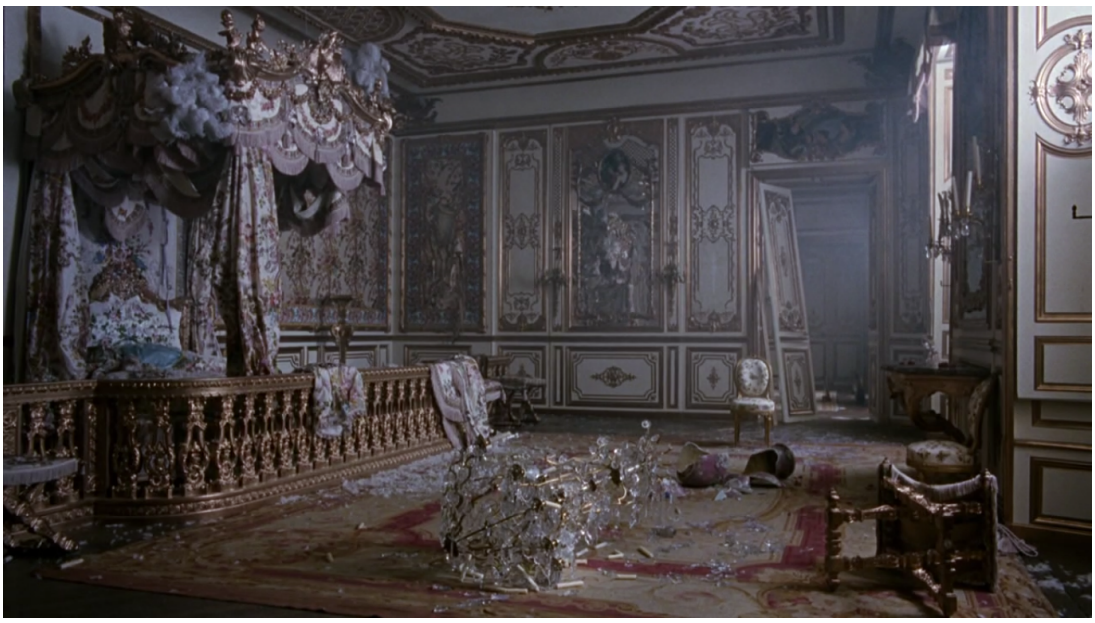

Figure 5.9 The film's sole post-revolution image is static and empty, but suggests a barely contained power.

Walter Jackson Bate notes that Keats's imagery, often considered essentially "statical", actually expressed a "highly dynamical power momentarily caught at rest

and concentrated and imprisoned within an otherwise static image" (*Negative Capability* 58). Coppola's imagery suggests a similar barely contained power, a potential energy existing within a delimited container, one embodied by both the mise-en-scène and by Marie. Depictions of excess are almost always tempered by picturesque restraint, which speaks to a "hidden intention and movement which Keats called 'electric fire'" (71) and underscores their indecorousness.

Lamia refuses a "neoclassical disposition toward balance" (Winakur Tontplaphol 50), something she shares in common with Marie-Antoinette, no matter how hard the latter may try to achieve decorous unity with her environments. Lamia's power is not only evident in her status as a demi-goddess, it is written aesthetically on her very body:

> [C]onstrained in nearly every sense, [she] debuts and remains the antithesis of pallor. She is, in other words, colourful in the most literal sense of that term: tint-saturated, color-*full* […] with a barely contained aesthetic energy (49).

Marie is often similarly "tint-saturated" with heavy makeup, particularly rouge, a frosting of silver in her hair. Her costumes are always the most colourful and striking amongst those of the ladies of the court—something that serves to focus the spectator's visual attention in the frame, but also to highlight her particular "life force" and "barely contained aesthetic energy".

But Coppola does not only choose to depict Marie's bodily excessiveness. She also portrays her as physically diminutive, vulnerable, and fragile—a beautiful commodity fetish. The tiny ribbons wrapped in her natural hair and around her neck (a foreshadowing of the guillotine, but also a symbol of her delicacy), together with multiple scenes featuring the girl stripped amidst large groups of fully dressed people (figure 5.10), counteract the public's fantasy image of a vampire queen in black lipstick. With her childlike dimples, protruding canine teeth, baby-fine flaxen hair, and womanly "hourglass" physique, Dunst conjures notions of both adolescent innocence and ripe sexuality (a combination Coppola uses to similar effect in *The Virgin Suicides*). Her beauty is meant to bring prestige to the court and the king in a very public, ceremonial way. This is similar to Lamia's beauty enhancing the prestige of Lycius (Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure" 68). Early on in the film, when

she is spied from a distance by the eternally snide and simpering "aunts" for the first time, one of them remarks, "She looks like a little piece of cake". It is meant as a compliment, but it summarises Marie's aesthetic problem: she is an elite, prettified object ripe for human consumption, but she is essentially disposable.

In her journey from foreign innocent to worldly queen, Marie's sartorial and lifestyle excesses function as a kind of psychic armour covering this bodily vulnerability. They are not so much intrinsic to her nature, as they are for the "electric" (Gigante 439) body of Lamia, but a personal refashioning perpetuated to serve the purpose of delight in the pleasures, and power, of the pretty. Still, Coppola generally chooses to downplay the traditional sense of the "power" factor of Marie's costumes; their inviolably pastel colour schemes—inspired by the macarons from the director's favourite Parisian patisserie, Ladurée—are not just historically inaccurate but remove the masculine from the equation. The historical Marie-Antoinette was known for her propensity for cross-dressing (mostly in male riding attire) (Weber 149), but you would never guess this from Coppola's highly feminised queen. However, two key scenes outside of her period of mourning do feature Marie in uncharacteristic black: her initial, and only, exchange with Du Barry, and her impromptu excursion to the masked ball. In these scenes Marie wilfully decides to express her power and desire for rebellion, at first by supposedly acquiescing to a direct order in the most perfunctory way possible, and then by refusing outright to follow court protocol.

Denise Gigante connects the idea of bodily monstrosity in *Lamia* to a "radically new aesthetic" beginning in the late eighteenth century ("Monster in the Rainbow" 434). This theory sought to abandon the purely mechanistic outlook of Newtonian science that "reduces life to its bodily functions"—what Keats decried in *Lamia* as "unweav[ing] a rainbow" (*Poems* 431), robbing the life force of its beauty, mystery, and power. (Lamia herself is referred to as "rainbow-sided") (415). For Kant, monstrosity was something which "exceeds representation" (Gigante 434), linked to a sublime life force that is "too big for the matter containing it" (434). This is a materialist view, but crucially not mechanistic; the notion of a "self-propagating vital power" is an organic one (435).

Figure 5.10 Coppola focuses on Marie-Antoinette's fragility almost as much as she does her specular power, such as in this dressing ceremony scene.

If beauty is a decorous state achieved through harmony, "monstrosity emerges as a principle opposed to their harmonious convergence in form" (436). While Gigante argues that Lamia's "excessive vitality" is too much for Lycius' "feeble" human frame (434), in Coppola's film, Marie-Antoinette serves the dual role of Lamia *and* Lycius. Her own fragility and instability of body—a body that is, as Galt writes, "owned first by the state and then violently by the people" (*Pretty* 22)—cannot adequately contain her own vitality, one that is forcefully inducted into a world that seeks to control its very biological functions.

For Kant, "an object is monstrous where by its size defeats the end that forms its concept" (Kant 83). Marie's "concept", her purpose, is to be a deferential wife, devoted and attractive member of the court, and most critically, mother to one or more male heirs to the throne. Her social roles are ones defined by others. In exceeding those roles, she exhibits, as Gigante writes of Lamia, an "aesthetic magnitude that nullifies its own purpose" and consequentially "defeats […] her status as beautiful" (Gigante 438, 440). Despite the mortal frame she temporarily inhabits, Lamia "refuses to sacrifice her signature excess" (Winakur Tontplaphol 50–51); Marie asserts her will against the structures of the court, however unconsciously, by asserting her signature excess as well. Such a will to pleasure Rushton calls a form of Emersonian "self-reliance", a "sense of being able to build one's own life in one's own way based on one's own decisions" (Rushton 124).

Considering how the real-life queen's costumes "triggered severe socio-political disorder" (Weber 3), one could even argue that this will to pleasure (if not power) ignites a political revolution almost by design, monstrously extending beyond Marie's own body into the body politic. As such, she wills revolution through her own excess. In Coppola's film, the revolution forces Marie-Antoinette out of her self-willed "cocoon" and into the stark reality of death and the suffering of those on the other side of the palace gates.

"Dying into Life": Embracing the Romantic "Depth" Model?

The progenitors of Romantic theories about life force, most notably physiologist John Hunter, considered monstrosity as "something gone awry during 'recapitulation,' or 'self-repetition'" (Gigante 437). Anna Backman Rogers highlights the visual theme of repetition through ritual in Coppola's film (Backman Rogers 85), such as the montages of endless similar meals, attendance of mass, and dressing ceremonies. This repetition not only emphasises the drudgery and pointless pageantry of court existence, it also encapsulates Marie's personal history, a constant recapitulation and repetition through an endless struggle to reinvent herself.

Coppola chooses to emphasise this cycle of attempted growth and recapitulation through the last full scene of her narrative, which ends not with the queen's head being severed but with her "saying goodbye" to the palace she called home, just as she said goodbye to her Austrian birthplace at the film's beginning. This not only links Marie to the materiality of an earthly location, but foreshadows her ability to "grow", to break free of an endless cycle of false starts, which will eventually only come through her death. As Rushton writes, the only way the queen can deal with such an unjust world "is to say 'good-bye' to it" (Rushton 115). Marie's final, dignified acceptance of her fate (her recognition that she is "out of place" in a "world of moral catastrophe") (115) is akin, not unlike the wilful acts of the Lisbon girls in *The Virgin Suicides,* to passing judgment on that world.

Marie's "soul-making" journey from narcissism to sympathetic union represents an ethical turn toward society, and mirrors the journey of several of Keats's mythical heroes. When an angry crowd whipped into revolutionary fervour starts to descend

on the palace, a sober-faced Marie insists multiple times, "My place is here with my husband". After sending the servants and her friends away with tearful goodbyes, she stands in the foyer, a solitary figure looking up towards the light as if summoning strength from the depths of her being. The balcony scene in the film, in which she silently bows toward the mob as if acquiescing to defeat and offers her neck in supplication, functions as a synecdoche of the death scene.

But it also represents a Keatsian notion of "d[ying] into life" from his poem *Hyperion* (*Poems* 306). In this mythological epic, Apollo is shown the "knowledge of human suffering"; combined with sympathy, this knowledge makes him "godlike" and immortal (Weston 106), just as it also brings him profound anguish. Walter Jackson Bate describes this dying into life as an "instinctive working towards a purpose, the beauty of man, his particular identity, his truth" (*Negative Capability* 69). This suffering and sympathy is what creates a soul; for Keats it is the "vale of Soul-making": "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" he writes in an 1819 letter (*Letters* 250). Like Apollo, Marie feels but cannot understand her sadness, trapped in pursuit of her self-absorbed daydreams. The revolution frees her from the contained limits of her narcissism.

In Keats's *Endymion*, the titular hero gains the ability "to recognize that he is not alone in his suffering" (Schapiro 48), and with that "recognition and acceptance of the pain and loss comes the birth of compassion" (59) and a loss of "narcissistic isolation" (43). Marie offers herself up as a sacrificial object, but her value is now not inscribed in her body, but her consciousness. She will soon die, but in dying into life, she has conjured the "immortal Self within" (Benton 40), a Keatsian loss of personal identity that arises from an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life and all suffering. While she passes judgment upon the world, she also feels its pain.

Barbara Schapiro contrasts the Keatsian "dreamer" with the Keatsian poet; while the former is a "narcissist, hopelessly fixated on his own idealizations and fantasies", the poet "speaks always for a relationship with the real world outside the self" (53). In the film, Marie-Antoinette functions as a sort of Keatsian dreamer who becomes a poet, just as "Keats the poet triumphs over Keats the dreamer […] by his acceptance

of the pain, change, and loss that inevitably accompany growth" (60). Coppola speaks to her character's growth when she acknowledges that the other protagonists in her trilogy remained "on the verge" of growing up, but that this is her first film "about a girl becoming a woman" (Hohenadel). That this pain and growth inexorably leads to Marie's own demise is a necessary function of the ethical vacuum of the society of which she is a part.

Schapiro's Freudian reading of Keats adopts a psychological depth model, and as a result, she derides the elements of fancy in Keats's writing, referring to the "excesses and lack of judgment", "florid diction", and "emotional overindulgence" of his work as "reflect[ing] the immaturity of vision itself" (Schapiro 47). In contrast, she lauds Keats's "greater restraint and concentration" in works such as *Endymion* as evidence of the "increasing ability to surmount his obsession with an infantile fusing love and to integrate his ambivalently split internal relationships" (47). She even writes that Keats's poem *To Autumn* "realizes a similar success in its integration of the regressive, feminine, and melancholic feelings with assertive, masculine, and affirmative ones" (60). The message here is clear: for Schapiro, when Keats's work exists in the realm of fancy rather than imagination and the lyric "I", it is degraded, shallow, and "feminine", operating without reason or a masculine sense of moral utility and sublime transcendence.

Given the traditional modes of value placed on high canonical Romantic poetry and its rejection of fancy, it is tempting to validate the film's eventual turn to both aesthetic and narrative bleakness as evidence of its acceptance of a "proper" ethical code and a rejection of its former luxurious excess. Richard Rushton downplays Coppola's depictions of this feminine excess as non-integral to the film, or indicative of the moral rot of Versailles society. In some ways this misses the point. Coppola's dark turn (necessitated, of course, by history) does operate in the vein of Schapiro's assertion of Keats's turn away from "florid" excess, but this does not negate the film's reliance on ornament, *jouissance*, the fanciful, and indecorous materiality. It should be noted that Lionel Trilling describes *Lamia*, one of Keats's later, "mature" works, as "vulgar […] in extreme form" ("The Fate of Pleasure" 68).

Rather, the interludes of consumption, sensuous excess, and material communion throughout the film are all representative of Marie-Antoinette's repeated attempts at

soul-making, a reiteration of the search for self-identity in the face of abjection. I argue they are more ethical within the context of the film than her "acceptance" of all human suffering because they continue to allow her subjecthood—not to mention joy—rather than resignation and annihilation. That Coppola's protagonists sometimes have to pay the ultimate price for their feminine desire is not a good thing, nor do her films posit it as such.

Depictions of the queen in the film's final act portray her as a different kind of monster: an emotionally hollowed-out zombie, who shuffles around in mourning black, sleepwalking through her own life. It is as if the flames of her "electric fire", or her life force, have been doused. *Marie Antoinette*'s ending, in some ways, detracts from the sense of subversion that scenes venerating the fancy and the pretty portray, but it does not erase it. The queen's "growing up", for Coppola, is not necessarily a celebratory event—it has rarely seemed quite so unappealing, so unsatisfying—and it is also not a form of chastising those who delight in the "chick culture" elements of her films, which Ferriss and Young describe as a "feminist aesthetic focused on youth, fashion, sexuality, celebrity, and consumerism" (99). Judging by their preponderance in her films, she clearly delights in them as well.

The abrupt change in tone registers as a minor shock with the spectator. But this shock is not a result of the violently sublime heroics of revolution; it is, rather, the shock of acquiescence, the pain of surrendering a *raison d'etre*, a passion and desire for the world in all its material sensuality. It robs Marie of her vitality. While Coppola fashions herself as a filmmaker preoccupied by materiality and sensuousness, operating through non-judgmental fellow feeling and benevolent objectivity, her film does question the stifling of creativity and fancy by masculine "reason" and historical "progress" and its rejection of alterity altogether.

The film's final full scene—Marie's "bidding adieu" to Versailles—does not only encompass wistful nostalgia and the relief of letting go. This curious and even childlike character detail actually suggests that Marie's defiance, her commitment to fancy, remains intact. It is a purely fanciful expression: in saying "goodbye" to the palace (a "Mansion of Many Apartments" which represents the totality of her soon-to-be-ended life) she "animates" and "personifies" her world (Cane Robinson 42). In such a way she retains a commitment to the fancy and its recuperative effects until

the very end. That is not to say that the film does not question excess, more specifically excess of pleasure. Just as in Keats's poetry, it exhibits a so-called "dialectic of pleasure", a combination of its intense affirmation and scepticism toward it (Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure" 68).

For Marie, pleasure in luxury is a way to protect against the effects of a dehumanising political and social system. Such pleasure suggests the "the idea of dignity in all man" (67). According to Lionel Trilling, pleasure can conform both to "the principle of reality" or that of illusion (69). He points to Keats's description of lines from *Lamia*, which the poet refers to as "a doubtful tale from faery land". This "faery land", Trilling insists, is "the scene of erotic pleasure which leads to devastation" (69), a description that could aptly be applied to Marie-Antoinette's own world. The "self-negating" aspects of pleasure are exemplified by the film's depictions of modern autonomous imaginative hedonism. Both Keats and Coppola ultimately view eroticism, luxury, and pleasurable excess through an ambiguous lens.

Conclusion

Marie Antoinette engages in what can be defined as a postmodern view of ethics in its questioning of an established acceptance of the greater moral good of "masculine" reason and realism. It does this through an ambivalent response to pleasure, specifically pleasure in excess and voracious consumption, the indeterminacy created by the birth of modernity and the bourgeoisie, and the ego-obliteration and surface exploration of fancy and the material sublime versus the suffering and "soul-making" of the Romantic depth model of personal growth, which relies upon the shaping powers of imagination. The film's approach toward its protagonist, which combines sympathetic communion with a more objective point of view, underscores its commitment to this ambivalence.

Coppola's fleeting focus on Romantic love paints a portrait of illusory desire, while her depictions of narcissistic pursuits of pleasure and the ornamental within the film's mise-en-scène flirt with sublimity in Keats's material sense. Like the sister protagonists of *The Virgin Suicides*, Coppola's queen embodies the bifurcation of

the sublime and beautiful. But unlike the Lisbon girls, she is not a simple depiction of the commodity value of the female in the marketplace. Her story also represents the personal "growth" of the "greater Romantic lyric" (Cane Robinson 38). The "shearing away of excess" that the film exhibits in its final scenes has been viewed as the proper course of the absorption of fancy along the path toward "the more mature shaping spirit of imagination" (38) in Romantic poetry, a process in which "the experiential excesses of passion and sexuality give way before the 'flint-and-iron' heroism of a poetry of the completely realized subject" (37). However, it is difficult to view Marie-Antoinette purely under these terms of newfound heroism; in her "heroic" hour, she is stripped not only of her excess, but of her assertion of subjectivity through that excess.

According to Cane Robinson, the Romantic lyric's "drama of maturation is precisely the drama in which the Fancy, with its sensuousness and participatory energies, gives way to the disinterested tragic attitude" (36). In the film, this new attitude, and the removal of ornamental excess it necessitates, is a painful break for both audience and protagonist, tantamount to a ripping away of the sensuous pleasures of the pretty, the fancy, and life itself. It may be "soul-making", but it is also a literal destruction. Coppola's film challenges us to question our belief in "progress" at the expense of personal desire and creative freedom. Growing up need not necessitate giving up. "The Fancy", writes Cane Robinson, is "not simply a self-contained psychological efflorescence but a social event" (43). Robbing Marie-Antoinette of her fanciful spirit robs her of a voice and place within the world.

Conclusion: On Endings and New Beginnings

In his post-mortem of the brief period of New Hollywood rebellion comprising 1960s and 1970s American film, Robert Phillip Kolker defines what he calls a "cinema of loneliness" (Kolker x). According to Kolker, a sense of isolation permeates not only the films of the era, but the milieu in which they were made:

> These are films made in isolation and, with few exceptions, about isolation […] they only perpetuate the passivity and aloneness that has become their central image […] [F]or all the challenge and adventure, their films speak to a continual impotence in the world, an inability to change and create change (Kolker 10).

Kolker's conclusion is debatable—his contention that these films do not challenge cultural norms he clearly admits they signal as "abhorrent" (10) seems antithetical. (A lack of providing answers to problems certainly does not imply an endorsement of them.) But in many ways, his assessment of these older films is similar to the ideas I have engaged with in the discussion of my own corpus. The films I analyse all contain characters, particularly protagonists, who seem stuck in their own isolation, unable to reach beyond themselves to create meaningful connections with other selves—it is as if Emerson's "circles" have been replaced by wheels that simply spin in place, unsure of the direction they should go.

The difference between these newer films and those of their predecessors is in their characters' continual attempts to bridge gaps between themselves and the world in order to regenerate the degraded connections between persons. If New Hollywood is the "cinema of loneliness", this new cycle of neo-Romantic films can be characterised as the "cinema of tentative connections". Unlike those of a previous generation, these films are comprised of characters who implicitly signal a desire to rely on others for comfort and recognition—their humanism[51] is rooted in a

[51] For the purposes of this study, humanism is defined as a general philosophy that "gives special importance to human concerns, values, and dignity" (Law 264). I do mean to relate it to any kind of "atheistic world view" (263), and I especially do not mean to suggest that humanism in this context denotes rationalism or "scientism", "the view that every meaningful question can in principle be answered by application of the scientific method" (265).

Romantic attempt to expand both inner and outer vision in order to create a larger community of selves.

Sometimes these efforts are thwarted or even negated, such as in the tragic outcomes of *The Virgin Suicides* (199*), Marie Antoinette* (2006*),* and *Synecdoche, New York* (2008). However, just as often these imperfectly executed connections result in hopeful change and a continued *belief* in the power of that change, if only by increments. The films I discuss posit the dialectic of "self vs. world" (Mayshark 11)—they acknowledge a fundamental chasm between subjectivities, one perhaps exacerbated by our current age. But from the Fox family's ecstatic supermarket reverie at the conclusion of *Fantastic Mr Fox* to Theodore and Amy's rooftop reunion in *Her*, they also implicitly or explicitly affirm that only a community of selves will be able to successfully navigate such a world, even if those selves will never be able to fully understand each other.

The Romantic suffering of *Weltschmerz*—that egocentric, self-conscious introspection that becomes so all-consuming it takes on "cosmic significance" for those experiencing it (Thorslev 42)—potentially can be cured (or at least treated), as these films suggest. But it can only be done so in fits and starts via hopeful, tentative connections made through imaginative sympathy and emotional vulnerability, and a questioning of absolutes. Peter Thorslev summarises this potential for change through intersubjective connection:

> If any escape from this tragic dilemma is possible […] I suppose it must lie in the solution of modern humanism: a realization of the limits of the human mind and a cultivation of one's own values in an assertion of a community of selves in an ultimately unknown and unknowable universe (89).

For the Romantics, freedom is found not in reason, but through imaginative capability; imagination represents not only the freedom to create art as "a central place in the organisation of human experience" (Waugh 19) but also to co-create a radically fictional space in a community that is "constantly engaged in endless reinterpretation" (22). The collaborative medium of the cinema certainly represents such a "community of selves". Unlike Wordsworth or Keats, working in isolation or

while communing with nature, a filmmaker (at least in the conventional sense) must create such a community, however makeshift, in order to realise imaginative vision amidst the chaos of life. The cinema of these filmmakers celebrates its fictionality as imaginative power, a "*radically fictional* sense of truth" (33), as much as an anxious relation to indeterminacy.

According to Kaufman, "there are no grand conclusions" (Tobias) to be drawn from life, but it is less difficult to draw them from art. I have attempted to do so by relating these works to both Romantic philosophy and literature, critical responses to Romanticism, and contemporary ideas of "metamodernism" (Vermeulen and van den Akker) based on a linkage of Romantic characteristics along a modernist and postmodern continuum. "To live and think in a constant state of negotiation (perhaps more commonly, agitation) with the world, others, and oneself" (LaRocca 9) is the state of Romantic irony, a state of perpetual change.

Such a state requires "a kind of bravery in the midst of indeterminacy, and a form of compassion for what lies beyond comprehension" (9). I argue that these films fundamentally express compassion both for their characters and their audiences in the midst of such often-incomprehensible chaos, and a commitment to a highly Romantic longing for connection and meaning via shared emotion and sympathy. That these connections are never completely realised is simply indicative of the overwhelming worldview of this cinema: the attempt is always more important than the execution, because their humanity lies in the attempt, in the doing and the becoming.

If the films' characters, and their creators, are not necessarily "brave", they are at least willing to acknowledge how little they understand about life, and are capable of leaving questions unanswered. In these final pages I briefly summarise my arguments as they relate to the key Romantic principles identified in the introduction: the emphasis on personal imagination and authenticity, subjectivity and its relation to the larger world, and emotion as a means of intersubjective connection.

The Romantic Relationship to Reality: A Questioning of Absolutes

The films discussed all speak to the idea that "truth" is a relative term, one coloured by the relation between a subject's highly idiosyncratic and personal point of view and the world that subject inhabits. As Derek Hill writes in his discussion of *The Royal Tenenbaums*, these films are "dream[s] which oscillate between the vibrantly 'real' and completely artificial" (Hill 101). Their fictional, artificial worlds serve as the landscape to explore emotional truth. According to Andrea K. Henderson, Romanticism "is a creature of surfaces, of context, and of varying forms; and when it appears most self-consistent, it may be least so" (Henderson 5). This lack of consistency, or warring impulses between the opposing forces of the Romantic personality—a longing to see oneself as part of a meaningful whole, and a desire to make an individual mark via a "passionate assertion of oneself" (Thorslev 88, 89)—establishes the fundamental dialectic of a Romantic engagement with life. It is this dialectic, reinvigorated through Vermeulen and van den Akker's conception of "metamodernism", that characterises the idiosyncratic displays of passion and resignation, hope and despair, and connection and isolation in these films.

Through explorations of memory, expressions of affect both dampened and sincere, and bursts of imaginative creativity that eschew pure filmic realism in favour of a deeper emotional reality, Coppola, Jonze, Anderson, and Kaufman all create highly personal cinema that bears the indelible mark of its creators, even as it is the product of collaborative effort. That mark does not exist in a cultural or historical vacuum. These films are as much a product of their own era as they are the result of individual mental wellspring. Influenced and shaped by more than two hundred years of Romantic thought, they arrive at a time when Francis Fukuyama's famous pronouncement of the potential "end of history" (Fukuyama 4) has had a generation to reverberate through the political and cultural climate. The word *ending*, of course, has a stark finality to it—whether it is a happy one or not. But for the true Romantic, an ending represents more than the end of one thing; it also marks the beginning of something else.

In his essay relating the Romantic and postmodern senses of endings, J. Drummond Bone writes, "Reality, with a small 'r', is open-ended" (73). Bone admits that such a

grand statement of truth about the nature of reality is in itself *not* open-ended, and therein lies a paradox, another irony (74). Despite their engagement with the dialectic of Romantic irony, almost all of these films have conclusive endings to their narratives. Their various plots and subplots are all wrapped up fairly neatly. Many feature the great exemplar of finality: death. *Synecdoche, New York, The Virgin Suicides, The Royal Tenenbaums,* and *The Life Aquatic* all feature major character deaths in their final acts, while the implied death of the protagonist in *Marie Antoinette* is obvious. Some end simply with their characters achieving a form of resolution to their problems, as in *Fantastic Mr Fox*. Jonze's *Her* is perhaps the least conclusive ending, although we do know that the relationship between its two central characters is inexorably over—Samantha leaving Theodore represents another important kind of death: the death of a relationship.

Bone contends that endings that achieve such a feeling of finality actually (ironically) result in an important dialectic of their own: "The metaphysical underpinnings of absolute structures of thought tend to inscribe ending as the beginning of that which lies beyond their text" (74). Such endings "are thus more 'open' in one sense than ends which are accidental" (74). While an open ending just "sits" there, waiting for resolution that never comes, a closed ending indicates that, when the last act concludes, a new one is waiting in the wings. The end of one thing is always the beginning of another, just as, in Schlegelian terms, a thing is just another thing in the act of becoming (Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* 5).

These films, then, demonstrate both a mournful sense of loss due to endings, and a hope for the perpetual renewal of the beginnings born of those endings. The death of "grand narratives" (Lyotard xxiii) does not mean the death of individual stories that contain a search for meaning. Whereas in the early 1980s, the term "postmodernism" began to signal a "pervasive cynicism about the progressivist ideals of modernity" (Waugh 5), by the mid-1990s, that given cynicism became a jumping-off point for a commentary on cynicism itself. The "new sincerity" externalises an ideological struggle between sincerity and cynicism by making that struggle, in part, an imaginative but sobering game. For the Romantic, art becomes "an intensely serious kind of play which defines mankind in terms of freedom" (Boreham and Heath 45). Such a freedom lies within the limitless world of the

human mind, the imagination. But the reliance upon imagination to bridge the gap between self and world can have an unintentional consequence: an increasing withdrawal from the world itself.

The Battle Between Self-consciousness and Solipsism

While the "Romantic era saw the production of a diversity of models for understanding subjectivity" (Henderson 3), the challenge to the "depth model" led to a crisis in the conception of self (3). The danger of the pendulum swinging so wide meant it often would swing back with unassailable force—resulting in the "poet's anxious need for self-assurance" (Rzepka 9). The resultant "visionary solipsism" (9) produces a subject that radically turns back in toward herself, intent on securing subjectivity in the face of indeterminacy. The indeterminacy of postmodernism threatens to exacerbate this tendency, one that is evident in all the films I discuss.

It is found in the Tenenbaum children's quest to reassert their long-past status as a "family of geniuses"; in Steve Zissou's similar attempt to reclaim the highs of his glory days by avenging the death of his partner; in Caden Cotard's desire to make meaningful and authentic art that will solidify his legacy; in the Lisbon girls' assertion of subjectivity through *Weltschmerz*-fuelled "self-oblivion" (Thorslev 170); in Theodore Twombly's need for the self-affirmation found in love; in Mr Fox's plan to realise his "true" self through his farm raids; and in Marie-Antoinette's constant struggle to "find herself" amidst her various passions.

Waugh writes of two separate strains of subjectivity she sees in Romantic thought: "radical fictionality" and "radical situatedness" (19). The former she attributes to Coleridge and his concept of a self that "exists in its ability to work with the fragments available to it and from them to project on to the world new fictions by which to live" so that "the self can potentially shape its own world" (19). Such "new fictions" correspond to the self that creates them: "The self is always a creation out of available materials, never an archaeological discovery at a fixed point of origin" (22). I place Kaufman and Coppola within this Romantic tradition. The selves they create constantly search for self-actualising moments that will define their existence as an "infinite I AM" (Coleridge 167), but more often than not they exist within

radically decentred worlds where their selfhood is being relentlessly questioned or even invalidated. Their lives are fragmentary, and they often fight against this idea. Their creators, however, invariably embrace the chaos and fragmentary nature of existence. The aesthetic emphasis on destabilising and decentring depictions of time and space (Kaufman) or an insistence on focusing on surfaces and sensations (Coppola) suggest an ironic relation to subjectivity as it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate" (Coleridge, *Biographia* 167) new selves that are just as fictional as the previous ones.

Waugh sees the Wordsworthian view of subjecthood as "radical situatedness", which affirms the body's place within a nature that is "always in motion" (22). Modernity becomes "a characteristic denial or disavowal" of such a "being-in-the-world" (23) that renders the subject detached, a manipulator of a nature that has become "inert" (23). Anderson's and Jonze's films best exemplify this fundamental break of the subject's relation to the chaos of nature. Their protagonists spend their time "looking, speculating and judging" (23) often without participating (or participating half-heartedly). Their subjectivity is less fractured than those populating Kaufman's and Coppola's films, but they suffer crises of self nonetheless. Trapped by their own imaginative subjectivity, they are unable to renounce the idea of their "fixed point of origin" (22). Anderson's and Jonze's mise-en-scène depict the picturesque detachment of their characters (and, perhaps, their authors as well), gazing upon life, frozen in contemplation, unable to live. The freedom to create and destroy, in Romantic ironic fashion, is impeded by such self-consciousness (45). While overcoming it completely is beyond the scope of human power, the struggle to do so still comprises these films' Romantic core.

Despite their differences in portrayal, egocentric self-assertion leaves all of these characters, at one point or another, detached from life. Preoccupied by their own obsessions with self, they despair at their inability to reach out to others in any meaningful way. In the Romantic age, such a visionary solipsism "tended to produce, as its repressed double, a gothic sense of the insubstantiality of selves" (Henderson 38). In this Gothic world, "Life in general appears 'theatrical', a 'death-in-life', and embodied selves become mere actors or caricatures, or in more severe cases, insensate things altogether, like automata or walking corpses" (Rzepka 26).

This idea is felt most strongly in Kaufman's film. Caden Cotard represents both visionary solipsism and Gothic insubstantiality. He is a self-obsessed artist who becomes an actor in his own play, both an automaton—given direct orders on what movements to make and when to die—and a wandering corpse, not yet dead but afraid to live. Coppola's heroines are equally indicative of the Gothic sense of the theatrical; they are portrayed as their own shadow selves, viewed from the outside by egocentric spectators as if on stage. Cecilia Lisbon is not so much a walking corpse as she is a lounging one, and Marie-Antoinette wields her theatricality as a shield against those who seek to diminish her selfhood.

While Kaufman and Coppola most obviously engage with this Gothic flipside of subjectivity, Anderson and Jonze do as well. But their perhaps more optimistic works tend to display it more subtly: In Jonze's film, Theodore Twombly's soft-spoken timidity sometimes borders on the somnambulant, and Anderson has been accused of making his actors into mere objects of his highly orchestrated mise-en-scène (Hill 99)—his obsession with uniforms and theatrical character quirks often delimits subjectivity as mere caricature. This is actually an alternative form of the Gothic: a kitsch, highly idiosyncratic way to address the eternally duelling dialectic of asserting the self while questioning its very being. The films all constantly renegotiate self-assertion and self-negation as part of their questioning of definitive endings.

"Bravery in the Midst of Indeterminacy": Emotion as a Form of Revolution

If the need for self-assurance cannot be met, alternatives must be sought. Perhaps the transcendence found within the sublime can achieve a greater sense of wellbeing: a connection to the larger world combined with the elevation of personal power. If "we feel difficulty in believing in a grand narrative founded in the transcendent" (Larrissy 7) within the postmodern, we should not necessarily give up on it, for "the question of how far one can completely cut such a Postmodernism adrift from the transcendent persists, if its techniques and impulses have in fact emerged from a Romantic matrix" (7). For Waugh, the fundamental mode of

transcendence exists in the artist's relationship to her art: "We still play God imaginatively, but ironically and provisionally" (11). In this sense, any relation to the transcendence found in sublimity is one based on an ironic questioning of sublime transcendence itself.

The films I discuss have renegotiated a relationship to the transcendent through an aesthetic engagement with the sublime: they attempt to assert sublimity (for their characters) while portraying aesthetic projects that most strongly rely on ideas of the beautiful and the picturesque. Their engagement with various modes of the sublime—the Burkean, the Kantian, the egotistical, the feminine—are primarily an intellectual exercise. In *The Life Aquatic*, Anderson undercuts the sublime of the ocean's expanse with kitschy practical effects. In *The Virgin Suicides*, Coppola mocks the assertion of male power found within the egotistical sublime, although her images often conjure feelings of transcendence through ecstatic surface sensation, in the vein of the "material sublime". Only Kaufman goes so far as to attempt to engender true feelings of sublimity in the spectator through disorienting aesthetic effects, but his protagonist does not achieve a feeling of transcendence due to acknowledgement of his power of reason—to the contrary, he is perhaps literally mad.

Within modernity, Jean-François Lyotard finds sublimity in the indeterminacy of endings functioning as new beginnings, linking the sublime to the anxiety felt in the question "and what now?" (Lyotard 246). Indeed, he considers Burke's "major stake" in his conception of the sublime is "to show that the sublime is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening" (250). For Waugh, the sense of endings is especially pronounced within postmodernism:

> Though there are many forms of Postmodernism, they all express the sense that our inherited forms of knowledge and representation are undergoing some fundamental shift: modernity is coming to an end, strangled by its own contradictory logic, born astride of the grave which is now its abyss (7).

If the idea of modernity itself "coming to an end" does not incite sublime terror, it is difficult to think of what could. But as is true of all sublime feeling, it rests not only

in terror, but also delight. If the sublime, within the postmodern and the Romantic, can be considered a form of "resistance to the banal and automatizing effects of modern life" (Waugh 31), these films' intellectual engagement with it, at the very least, represents a questioning of such automatisation.

The films offer no solutions, but the idea of solutions is itself hardly a Romantic one. As Waugh suggests, in both Romanticism and postmodernism, "the aesthetic becomes the only possible means of redemption" from the totalitarian reason of Enlightenment (15). Reasonable solutions are too didactic for a view toward art "refurbishing the interior" rather than insisting on "systemic 'truth'" (6). Instead, the films' form of "bravery" is found in their engagement with sincere emotion, even as they represent the anxiety of indeterminacy. If change is the only true constant, establishing even tenuous emotional connections with other selves, or attempting to create emotional connections with spectators, can seem like a revolutionary act.

Historical influence remains a key to unlocking the films' relation to the here and now. According to Jurgen Habermas, in the late nineteenth century, "there emerged out of th[e] romantic spirit that radicalized consciousness of modernity which freed itself from all historical ties" (99). Rather than being freed from their ties to history, however, these films—even as they exist as fantastical, ahistorical creations—are very much situated within a historical trajectory. They do not represent history as the unassailable march of progress, however, but of a return to origins. As circles of imaginative recreation expand, they also cycle back. Focused on memory and the past in order to discover selves in the forever "ongoing incompleted *process*" of their creation (Waugh 25, her emphasis), their spirits in solitude attempt to forge hopeful connections amidst the endless potential of new beginnings.

After the era of 1990s American cinema, which often celebrated a pessimistic form of nihilism with the disillusioned sheen of "dampened affect" (Sconce 359), the cinema of the twenty-first century has managed to bring feeling, a desire for intimacy, and emotional vulnerability to the forefront even as it resists an outright ideological agenda. Derek Hill acknowledges the lack of a "conscious" movement in this "American No Wave":

> It's as if the idea of a group of filmmakers intentionally attempting to spark a revolution with their cameras is too dated, too romantic and too ridiculous even to ponder. It appeals to the ambitious 14-year-old within, even though the older, wiser, more cynical adult knows better (Hill 11).

Hill has managed to capture the entire *raison d'etre* of this non-movement movement in a single brief quotation. The idea *is* too romantic, and decidedly dated—dated back to the birth of the modern era itself. Regardless of conscious intention (and likely the result more of unconscious reaction), in this cycle of films Romantic idealism, which Hill considers the subject of ridicule, is met with world-weary postmodern cynicism, which he equates with wisdom. One gets the sense that these filmmakers would reverse his pronouncements of value. Regardless, to the victor goes the spoils whenever the dialectic game ends—but the true Romantic knows it never will.

List of Works Cited

Bibliography

Aaron, Michele. "Cinema and Suicides: Necromanticism, Dead-already-ness, and the Logic of the Vanishing Point". *Cinema Journal.* Volume 53, Number 2, Winter 2014: 71–92.

Abel, Richard. *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Abrams, M.H. "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age". *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 101–118.

Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Adamowicz, Elza. "Bodies Cut and Dissolved: Dada and Surrealist Film." *Gender and French Cinema.* Hughes, Alex and Williams, James S. Eds. Oxford: Berg, 2001: 19–34.

Allen, Richard. *Hitchcock's Romantic Irony*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Alpert, Robert. "The Artificial Intelligence of Her." *Jump Cut 56,* winter 2014/2015. http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/alpertHer/index.html

Andrew, Dudley. "Every Teacher Needs a Truant: Bazin and *L'Enfant sauvage*". *A Companion to François Truffaut*. Dudley Andrew and Anne Gillain, eds. Wiley Blackwell, 2013.

Annunziato, Sarah. “A Child's Eye View of Where the Wild Things Are: Lessons from Spike Jonze's Film Adaptation of Maurice Sendak's Picture Book”. *Journal of Children and Media*, 8:3: 253–266.

Astruc, Alexandre. “The Birth of the Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo”.*'L'Écran française' 30 March 1948.* http://www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml

Backman Rogers, Anna. *American Independent Cinema: Rites of Passage and the Crisis Image.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

Backman Rogers, Anna. “The Historical Threshold: Crisis, Ritual and Liminality in Sofia Coppola’s *Marie-Antoinette* (2006)” *RELIEF* 6 (1), 2012: 80–97.

Baggini, J. and Southwell, G. *Philosophy: Key Themes, 2nd edition.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Bainbridge, Simon. “Introduction” *Romanticism: A Sourcebook*. Simon Bainbridge, ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 1–19.

Barth, John. “The Literature of Exhaustion”. *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction.* London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984: 64–76.

Bate, Walter Jackson. “The English Romantic Compromise”. *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 149–169.

Bate, Walter Jackson. *Negative Capability: On the Intuitive Approach in Keats.* Contra Mundum Press, 2012.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, trans. New York: Columbia University, 1983.

Baxendale, Sallie. “Memories Aren’t Made of This: Amnesia at the Movies.” *BMJ :*

British Medical Journal 329.7480 (2004): 1480–1483.

Begg, Ean. *Cult of the Black Virgin.* Asheville: Chiron, 2006.

Bell, James. "Computer Love". *Sight and Sound.* Jan 2014; 24, 1: 20–25.

Benjamin, Walter. **"**Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century". *Perspecta*, Vol. 12 (1969): 163–172.

Benko, Stephen. *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian roots of Mariology*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993.

Benton, Richard P. "Keats and Zen". Philosophy East and West. V.15 No. ½ (1966): 33–47.

Bertram, Christopher. "Jean Jacques Rousseau", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/rousseau/

Behler, Ernst. "The Theory of Irony in German Romanticism". *Romantic Irony.* Frederick Garber, ed. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988: 43–81.

Biskind, Peter. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls.* New York: Touchstone, 1999.

Blake, William. "The Auguries of Innocence". *The Pickering Manuscript: electronic edition.* Morris Eaves, Robert Essick, Joseph Viscomi, eds. Chapel Hill: Carolina Digital Library and Archives, 2011. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/43650#poem

Bloom, Harold. "The Internalization of the Quest Romance". *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 3–24.

Bone, J. Drummond. “A Sense of Endings: some romantic and postmodern comparisons”. *Romanticism and Postmodernism.* Larrissy, Edward, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 73–89.

Bordwell, David. “Shot-consciousness.” *Observations of Film Art.* 16 January 2007. <www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2007/01/16/shot-consciousness/>.

Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Boreham, Judy and Heath, Duncan. *Introducing Romanticism.* Cambridge: Icon, 2005.

Borges, Jorges Luis. *Labyrinths.* London: Penguin Group, 2000.

Botting, Fred. “Virtual Romanticism”. *Romanticism and Postmodernism*. Edward Larrissy, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 98–112.

Bradshaw, Peter. “Fantastic Mr Fox”. *The Guardian.* 22 October 2009. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/oct/22/fantastic-mr-fox-review

Bradshaw, Peter. “Her”. *The Guardian*. 13 February 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/feb/13/her-review

Bradshaw, Peter. “The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou”. *The Guardian*. 18 February 2005. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2005/feb/18/the-life-aquatic

Bradshaw, Peter. “Marie Antoinette”. The *Guardian.* 20 Oct 2006. http://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/oct/20/drama.romance

Bradshaw, Peter. “The Virgin Suicides”. The *Guardian*. 19 May 2000. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/may/19/culture.reviews

Braendlin, Hans P., Ed. *Ambiguities in Literature and Film*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988.

Branigan, Edward. *Narrative Comprehension and Film.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Breazeale, Dan. "Johann Gottlieb Fichte", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/johann-fichte/

Brevik-Zender, Heidi. "Let Them Wear Manolos: Fashion, Walter Benjamin, and Sofia Coppola's Marie Antoinette". *Camera Obscura* 78. Volume 26, Number 3. Durham: Duke University Press: 1–33.

Brooks, Xan. "'One Does Feel Misunderstood." *The Guardian.* 8 November 2007. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/nov/09/2>.

Brown, Jane K. "Goethe, Rousseau, the Novel, and the Origins of Psychoanalysis". *Goethe Yearbook*, Volume 12, 2004: 111–128.

Buckland, Warren. "Wes Anderson: A 'Smart' Director of the New Sincerity?" *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (2012) 10:1: 1–5.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful.* Basil: J. J. Tourneisen, 1792.

Byron, Lord. "*Alas! The Love of Women!": Byron's Letters and Journals Vol. 3, 1813-1814.* Marchand, Leslie A., ed. London: John Murray, 1974.

Byron, Lord. *Cain and other Shorter Works.* Maryland: Wildside Press, 2008.

Byron, Lord. *Don Juan: In Sixteen Cantos, with Notes.* Halifax: Milner and Sowerby, 1837. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/21700?msg=welcome_stranger

Byron, Lord. *Manfred.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2014.

Byron, Lord. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2011.

Campbell, Colin. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism.* Alcuin Academics, 2005.

Cane Robinson, Jeffrey. *Unfettering Poetry: Fancy in British Romanticism*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Carbone II, Steven. "American Transcendentalism and Analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'Self-Reliance'." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, *2*(11), 2010. http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=329

Catterall, Ali. "Fantastic Mr Fox". *Film4.* http://www.film4.com/reviews/2009/fantastic-mr-fox

Caughie, John. "Cahiers du cinema". *Theories of Authorship.* Caughie, John, ed. London: Routledge, 1981: 35–47.

Campbell, Colin. *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism.* London: Alcuin Academics, 2005.

Cavell, Stanley. "The Avoidance of Love". *Must We Mean What We Say?* second edition Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.

Chabon, Michael. "Wes Anderson's Worlds" (Introduction). *The Wes Anderson Collection.* Seitz, Matt Zoller, Ed. New York: Abrams, 2013: 21–23.

Chocano, Carina. "Review: 'Synecdoche, New York'." *Los Angeles Times.* 24 October 2008. < www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-synecdoche24-2008oct24,0,2413505.story#axzz2vx0SPy00>.

Clayton, Alex. "V.F. Perkins: Aesthetic Suspense". *Thinking in the Dark: Cinema, Theory, Practice.* Murray Pomerance and R. Barton Palmer, eds. London: Rutgers University Press, 2016: 208–216.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria.* London: Everyman's Library, 1980.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Dejection: An Ode*. http://www.bartleby.com/41/421.html

Collin, Robbie. "Wes Anderson interview". *The Telegraph.* 19 February 2014.

Collins, Jim. "Genericity in the Nineties: Eclectic Irony and the New Sincerity." *Film Theory Goes to the Movies.* Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins, eds. New York-London: Routledge, 1993: 242–264.

Coppola, Sofia. *Marie Antoinette.* New York: Rizzoli, 2006.

Crawford, Rachel. *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700–1830.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis.* London: Routledge, 1993.

Crouch, Christopher. "Architecture, Design, and Modern Living". *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms.* Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker, eds. Oxford University Press, 2015: 618–634.

Cunningham, David. "The Futures of Surrealism: Hegelianism, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde" *SubStance.* Vol. 34, No. 2, Issue 107 (2005): 47–65.

Cwik, Greg. "Female Filmmakers Have It Just as Rough in Europe as They Do in Hollywood". *Vulture*. 1 May 2016. http://www.vulture.com/2016/05/female-directors-have-it-just-as-rough-in-europe.html

Dahl, Roald. *Fantastic Mr Fox.* London: Puffin (Penguin), 2016.

Dargis, Manohla. “Disembodied, But, Oh, What a Voice”. *The New York Times*. 17 Dec 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/18/movies/her-directed-by-spike-jonze.html

Dargis, Manohla. “High Hopes”. *LA Weekly.* 12 December 2001. http://www.laweekly.com/film/high-hopes-2134158

Davers, Rebecca. “’I Know How to Do the Play Now: A Part of Willy Loman in Synecdoche, New York”. *The Arthur Miller Journal*. Penn State University Press Vol. 6, No. 2 (fall 2011): 25–45 .

Del Serra, Maura. “Introduction”. *Negative Capability: The Intuitive Approach in Keats.* Contra Mundum Press, 2012.

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise.* New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Deming, Richard. “Living a Part: Synecdoche, New York, Metaphor and the Problem of Skepticism”. *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman.* LaRocca, David, ed. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011, 193–207.

Doane, Mary Anne ““The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space”. *Film Sound.* Elizabeth Weis and John Belton, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 162–176.

Docherty, Thomas. “Introduction”. *Postmodernism: A Reader.* Docherty, Thomas, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 1–32.

Dorey, Tom. “Fantastic Mr Filmmaker: paratexts and the positioning of Wes Anderson as Roald Dahl’s cinematic heir”. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2012: 169–185.

Downing, Lisa. “Foucault in Focus: Ethics, Surveillance, Soma”. *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters.* Downing, Lisa and Saxton, Libby eds. Taylor and Francis, 2009: 121–132.

Downing, Lisa. “The Cinematic Ethics of Psychoanalysis: Futurity, Death Drive, Desire”. *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters.* Downing, Lisa and Saxton, Libby eds. Taylor and Francis, 2009: 134–146.

Downing, Lisa. “What if we are post-ethical? Postmodernism’s ethics and aesthetics”. *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters.* Downing, Lisa and Saxton, Libby eds. Taylor and Francis, 2009: 147–159.

Ebert, Roger. “Fantastic Mr Fox”. *RogerEbert.com*. 24 November 2009. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/fantastic-mr-fox-2009

Ebert, Roger. “The Life Aquatic”. *RogerEbert.com*. 23 December 2004. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-life-aquatic-with-steve-zissou-2004

Ebert, Roger. “Marie Antoinette”. RogerEbert.com. 19 Oct 2006. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/marie-antoinette-2006

Ebert, Roger. “The Royal Tenenbaums”. *RogerEbert.com*. 01 December 2001. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-royal-tenenbaums-2001

Ebert, Roger. “Synecdoche, New York”. *RogerEbert.com.* 5 November 2008. < www.rogerebert.com/reviews/synecdoche-new-york-2008>.

Edelstein, David. “To Siri With Love”. *New York* magazine. 15 December 2013. http://nymag.com/movies/reviews/her-anchorman-2-2013-12/

Eisner, Lotte H. *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Elam, Diane. *Romancing the Postmodern.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. “Circles”. *Essays: First Series*. 1841. Project Gutenberg. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2944/2944-h/2944-h.htm#link2H_4_0010

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature.* Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836. https://ia802302.us.archive.org/12/items/naturemunroe00emerrich/naturemunroe00emerrich.pdf

Erlich, David. "Charlie Kaufman Reflects On His Career: 'I Feel Like I F*cking Blew It'". *Indiewire*. 12 July 2016. http://www.indiewire.com/2016/07/charlie-kaufman-interview-anomalisa-synecdoche-adaptation-1201702465/

Esterhammer, Angela. "The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon" *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 101–120.

Etherington, Daniel. "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou". *Film4.* http://www.film4.com/reviews/2004/the-life-aquatic-with-steve-zissou

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Virgin Suicides*. 2nd edition. London: Bloomsbury, 2002

"Europeans and Their Languages". European Commission. June 2012. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf

"Europeans and Their Languages: Special Eurobarometer 243". European Commission. Feb 2006. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf

Evans, Joel. "Figuring the Global: on Charlie Kaufman's Synecdoche, New York". *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 12:4: 321–338.

Ezra, Elizabeth. "Cléo's Masks: Regimes of Objectification in the French New Wave". *Noeuds de mémoire: Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture.* Yale University Press, 2010: 177–190.

Fender, Stephen. "Introduction." *Walden.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Ferguson, Adam. “An Essay on the History of Civil Society”. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.* http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004846977.0001.000/1:3?rgn=div1;view=full text

Ferguson, Niall. “Introduction: Crisis? What Crisis?” *The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in Perspective.* Niall Ferguson, ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Ferguson, Frances. *Solitude and the Sublime.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Festival de Cannes Daily. “Interview - Sofia Coppola”. http://org-www.festival-cannes.com/en/theDailyArticle/61113.html

Fletcher, John. “The Sins of the Fathers: the Persistence of Gothic.” *Romanticism and Postmodernism.* Edward Larrissy, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 113–140.

Flores, Pamela. "Fashion and Otherness: The Passionate Journey of Coppola's Marie Antoinette from a Semiotic Perspective". *Fashion Theory.* 17:5, 2013: 605–622.

Foucault, Michel. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I.* Robert Hurley, trans. London: Penguin, 1998.

Foundas, Scott. “Film Review: Her”. Variety. 12 October 2013. http://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/film-review-her-1200710608/

Foundas, Scott. “Wes Anderson Brings Wes Anderson-ness to *Fantastic Mr Fox*”. The Village Voice. 10 November 2009. http://www.villagevoice.com/film/wes- anderson-brings-wes-andersonness-to-fantastic-mr-fox-6392085

Francis, Emma. “‘Conquering good and conquering ill’: femininity, power and

Romanticism in Emily Bronte's poetry'". *Romanticism and Postmodernism.* Edward Larrissy, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 51–72.

Fraser, Antonia. "Sofia's Choice." *Vanity Fair*. 17 October 2006. http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2006/11/fraser200611

Fraser, Kennedy. "Kirsten Dunst: Teen Queen". *Vogue*. 1 September 2006. http://www.vogue.com/865326/kirsten-dunst-teen-queen/

Freeman, Barbara. *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction.* London: University of California Press, 1995.

French, Philip. "Marie Antoinette Review". The *Guardian*. 22 Oct 2006. http://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/oct/22/philipfrench

Freud, Sigmund. "General Theory of the Neuroses". *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Strachey, James, trans. and ed. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny.* London: Penguin Group, 2003

Frye, Northrup. "The Road of Excess". *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism,* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 120–132.

Fuller, Graham. "Death and the Maidens". *Sight and Sound.* April 2000, Vol. 10 Issue 4: 14–16.

Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18.

Galperin, William H. *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Galt, Rosalind. *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Galt, Rosalind. "Pretty: Film Theory, Aesthetics, and the History of the Troublesome Image" *Camera Obscura.* 71, Volume 24, Number 2. Duke University Press, 2009: 1–41.

George, Albert Joseph. *The Development of French Romanticism: The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Literature.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1955.

Gert, Bernard and Gert, Joshua. "The Definition of Morality". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/morality-definition/

Gevinson, Tavi. "Girls With Power and Mystique: An Interview With Sofia Coppola". *Rookie.* http://www.rookiemag.com/2013/06/sofia-coppola-interview/

Gibson Lockhart, John ("Z"). "Cockney School of Poetry. IV" *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.* Vol. III. April–August 1818. Edinburgh: William Blackwood: 519–524.

Gigante, Denise. "Foreword". *Romanticism and Pleasure*. Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert, eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010: ix–xv.

Gigante, Denise. "The Monster in the Rainbow: Keats and the Science of Life", *PMLA,* Vol. 117, No. 3 (May 2002): 433–448.

Gleiberman, Owen. "Movie Review: Synecdoche, New York." *Entertainment Weekly.* 24 October 2008. < www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20235024,00.html>.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust.* John R. Williams, trans. Wordsworth Editions, 1999.

Goethe, *Johan*n Wolfgang von, *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* Michael Hulse, ed. and trans. London: Penguin, 1989.

Gooch, Joshua. "Making a Go of It: Paternity and Prohibition in the Films of Wes Anderson". *Cinema Journal* 47, No.1, Fall 2007: 26–48.

Goodman, Russell. *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Goodman, Russell. "Transcendentalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/transcendentalism/>.

Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man.* London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996.

Grayson, Susan. "Rousseau and the Text". *Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychologies of the Self*, Lynne Layton and Barbara Ann Schapiro, eds. NYU: 1986: 78–96.

Gruder, Vivian R. "The Question of Marie-Antoinette: The Queen and Public Opinion Before the Revolution". *French History* (2002) 16 (3): 269–298.

Guillén, Michael. "Synecdoche, New York: Interview with Charlie Kaufman." *Twitch Film.* 23 October 2008. <twitchfilm.com/2008/10/synecdochenew-yorkinterview-with-charlie-kaufman.html>.

Guyer, Paul and Horstmann, Rolf-Peter, "Idealism". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/idealism/

Haarmann, Harald. "The Kinship of the Virgin Mary". *ReVision.* Winter98, Vol. 20 Issue 3: 17–25.

Habermas, Jurgen. “Modernity—An Incomplete Project”. *Postmodernism: A Reader.* Patricia Waugh, ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1992, 98–108.

Hamilton, Paul. “From Sublimity to Indeterminacy: New World order or Aftermath of Romantic Ideology”. *Romanticism and Postmodernism*. Edward Larrissy, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 13–28.

Hanisch, Carol. “The Personal Is Political”. *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation,* 1970. http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html

Hartman, Geoffrey. “Romanticism and ‘Anti-Self-Consciousness’”. *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 47–56.

Hartman, Geoffrey. *Scars of the Spirit: The Struggle Against Inauthenticity.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit.* A.V. Miller, trans. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Henderson, Andrea K. *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774–1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Hill, Derek. “’There’s No More Watching’: Artifice and Meaning in Synecdoche, New York and Adaptation”. *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman.* David LaRocca, ed. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011: 208–223.

Hockenhull, Stella. *Aesthetics and Neoromanticism in Film: Landscapes in Contemporary British Cinema.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

Hohenadel, Kristin. “French Royalty as Seen by Hollywood Royalty”. The *New York Times*. 10 September 2006. www.nytimes.com/2006/09/10/movies/moviesspecial/10hohe.html

Hornaday, Ann. “Ann Hornaday on 'Fantastic Mr Fox' with George Clooney” Washington Post. 27 November 2009. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/25/AR2009112501102.html

Hoskin, Bree. “Playground Love: Landscape and Longing in Sofia Coppola’s *The Virgin Suicides*”. *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No 3 (2007): 214–221.

Huddleston, Tom. “Interview: Charlie Kaufman”. *Time Out London.* http://www.timeout.com/london/film/interview-charlie-kaufman-1

Hume, David. *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 1751. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4320/4320-h/4320-h.htm

Hume, David. “Of the Standards of Taste”. *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. Eugene F. Miller, ed. 1987. Library of Economics and Liberty. 19 May 2016. http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL23.html

Hunt, Leigh. *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*. London, 1832.

Ivanchikova, Alla. “Machinic Intimacies and Mechanical Brides: Collectivity between Prosthesis and Surrogacy in Jonathan Mostow’s *Surrogates* and Spike Jonze’s *Her*”. *Camera Obscura* 91, Volume 31, Number 1: 65–91.

Jaeckle, Jeff. “The Shared Verbal Stylistics of Preston Sturges and Wes Anderson”. *New Review of Film and Television Studies.* 11:2: 154–170.

Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”. *New Left Review,* Jul 1, 1984, Vol. 0(146): 53–92.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1992.

Jarvis, Robin. *The Romantic Period: the Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1789–1830*. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004.

Johnson, Laurie Ruth. *Forgotten Dreams: Revisiting Romanticism in the Cinema of Werner Herzog.* Suffolk: Camden House, 2016.

Jollimore, Troy. "'This Endless Space between the Words': The Limits of Love in Spike Jonze's *Her*". *Midwest Studies In Philosophy.* Volume 39, issue 1, September 2015: 120–143.

Jones, Kent. "Family Romance". *Film Comment.* Nov 2001; 37, 6: 24–27.

Kafka, Franz. *The Trial.* London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2015.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Königsberg: Johann Jakob Kanter,1764.

Kaufman, Charlie. Synecdoche, New York *Shooting Script.* New York: Newmarket Press, 2008.

Kaufman, Charlie. "Why I Wrote Being John Malkovich". *Guardian.* 03 Oct 2011 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/oct/03/charlie-kaufman-how-to-write

Keats, John. *Complete Poems, Second Edition.* Barnard, John, ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

Keats, John. *Letters of John Keats.* Gidding, Robert, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Kertzer, Adrienne. "Fidelity, Felicity, and Playing Around in Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 36, no. 1, 2010: 4–24.

King. Geoff. *Indie 2.0 Change and Continuity in Contemporary American Indie Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2014.

Knight, C. Ryan. " 'Who's to Say?': The Role of Pets in Wes Anderson's Films". *The Films of Wes Anderson.* Peter C. Kunze, ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014: 65–76.

Kolker, Robert Phillip. *Cinema of Loneliness, second edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Kredell, Brendan. "Wes Anderson and the city spaces of indie cinema". *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 10:1, (2012): 83–96.

Kunze, Peter C. "From the Mixed-up Films of Mr. Wesley W. Anderson: Children's Literature as Intertexts". *The Films of Wes Anderson.* Peter C. Kunze, ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014: 91–108.

Laine, Tarja. *Bodies in Pain: Emotion and the Cinema of Darren Aronofsky*. Oxford: Berghahn, 2015.

Laine, Tarja. *Feeling Cinema.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

Landon, Letitia. "History of the Lyre". *The Venetian Bracelet, the Lost Pleiad, and A History of the Lyre and Other Poems.* London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green,1829.

Lane, Anthony. "Bloody Relations". *The New Yorker.* 17 December 2001. http://www.laweekly.com/film/high-hopes-2134158

Lane, Anthony. "Only Make Believe". *The New Yorker*. 23 December 2013. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/12/23/only-make-believe-2

Lane, Anthony. "Synecdoche, New York." *The New Yorker.* 10 November 2008. < www.newyorker.com/arts/reviews/film/synecdoche_new_york _kaufman>.

Lang, Brent. “Women Comprise 7% of Directors on Top 250 Films”. *Variety*. 20 October 2015. http://variety.com/2015/film/news/women-hollywood-inequality-directors-behind-the-camera-1201626691/

LaRocca, David. “Introduction”. *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman.* David LaRocca, ed. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011: 1–20.

Larrissy, Edward. “Introduction”. *Romanticism and Postmodernism*. Edward Larrissy, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 1–12.

Larson, J. A. (1987). *From Romanticism To Surrealism: A Study of Connections* (Order No. 8713665). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/docview/303475920?accountid=10673

Lauzen, Martha. “Still Too Few Women Behind the Scenes in Hollywood”. *Women’s Media Center.* 28 January 2016. http://www.womensmediacenter.com/feature/entry/still-too-few-women-behind-the-scenes-in-hollywood

Law, Stephen. *Humanism: The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, eds. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Lefort, Claude. *The Political Forms of Modern Society.* John B. Thompson, ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986.

Lemire, Christy. “At the Movies: ‘The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou’.” Associated Press. 08 December 2004. http://old.chronicle.augusta.com/stories/2004/12/08/mov_436631.shtml

Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animal.* London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* London: The Baffet, 1690. https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/l/locke/john/l81u/index.html

Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Government.* Public domain. London, 1689. http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf

Lokke, Kari. "The Figure of the Hermit in Charlotte Smith's 'Beachy Head'". The Wordsworth Circle, 1 January 2008, Vol.39(1/2): 38–43.

Luthy, Michael. "The Consumer Article in the Art World: On the Para-Economy of American Pop Art" *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture*. Max Hollein and Christoph Grunenberg eds., exhibition catalogue Tate Liverpool, Ostfildern-Ruit 2002, 148–53. http://www.michaelluethy.de/konsumgut-englisch.pdf

Lyotard, Jean-François. "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" *Postmodernism: A Reader.* Patricia Waugh, ed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1992: 38–46.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "Notes of the Meaning of 'Post-'." *Postmodernism: A Reader.* Docherty, Thomas, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 47–50.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde". *Postmodernism: A Reader.* Docherty, Thomas, Ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 244–256.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

MacDowell, James. "Notes on Quirky". *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism*, issue 1, 2010.

Maier, Charles S. “The United States and “globalization” in the 1970s”. *The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in Perspective.* Niall Ferguson, ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Manninen, Tuomas William and Bertha Alvarez. “David’s Need for Mutual Recognition: A Social Personhood Defense of Steven Spielberg’s *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*”. *Film Philosophy.* 20 (2016): 339–356.

Margulies, Alfred. “Avatars of desire and the question of presence: Virtual and transitional spaces meet their liminal edge – from *Pygmalion* to Spike Jonze’s *Her*, and beyond”. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 11 March 2016. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/1745-8315.12528/epdf

Martin-Jones, David. *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

May, Patrick. “Apple’s Siri Goes to the Movies to Check ‘Her’ Out”. *San Jose Mercury News*. 9 January 2014. http://www.mercurynews.com/2014/01/09/apples-siri-goes-to-the-movies-to-check-her-out/

Mayshark, Jesse Fox. *Post-pop Cinema: The Search for Meaning in New American Film.* Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009.

McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

McGrath, S J. “Schelling on the Unconscious”. *Research in Phenomenology;* 2010; 40, 1: 72–91.

McQuillan, Colin. “German Idealism.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

< www.iep.utm.edu/germidea/>.

Mellor, Anne K. *English Romantic Irony.* London: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender*. Routledge, 1993.

Mellor, Anne K. "Introduction". *Romanticism and Feminism.* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 1988: 3–9.

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick or The Whale.* London: Humphrey Milford, 1920.

Metz, Christian. "Aural Objects" *Film Sound: Theory and Practice.* Elizabeth Weis and John Belton, Eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985: 154–161.

Metz, Christian. *Film Language.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Milam, Jennifer. "Imagining Marie Antoinette: Cultural Memory, Coolness and the Deconstruction of History in Cinema". *French History and Civilization*. *Papers from the George Rudé Seminar*. Vol 4, 2011: 45–53.

Millan-Zaibert, Elizabeth. "What Is Early German Romanticism?" *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism.* Manfred Frank, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004: 1–21.

Milnes, Tim and Sinanan, Kerry. "Introduction". *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity.* Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 1–30.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation.* London: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Mitra, Sayantanava and Chatterjee, Seshadri Sekhar. "'I Do Not Exist'—Cotard Syndrome in Insular Cortex Atrophy". *Biological Psychiatry.* Volume 77, Issue 11, 1 June 2015: 53–53.

Monden, Masafumi. “Contemplating in a dream-like room: *The Virgin Suicides* and the aesthetic imagination of girlhood”. *Film, Fashion & Consumption* 2.2 (2013): 139–158.

Monk, Samuel H. “The Sublime: Burke’s Enquiry” *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 24–41.

Moriarty. “Moriarty Reviews Synecdoche, New York and Interviews the Great Charlie Kaufman.” *Ain’t It Cool News.* 28 October 2008. <www.aintitcool.com/node/38895>

Mount, Harry. “Sign of the Times: When Renovation Means Erasing the Past.” *The New York Times.* 7 October 2013. <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/07/sign-of-the-times-when-renovation-means-erasing-the-past/>.

Moats, David. “Charlie Kaufman's Synecdoche, New York Reviewed” *The Quietus.* 20 May 2009. http://thequietus.com/articles/01687-charlie-kaufman-s-synecdoche-new-york

Mohr, Hans-Ulrich. “The Picturesque: A Key Concept of the Eighteenth Century”. *The Romantic Imagination: Literature and Art in England and Germany.* Frederick Burwick and Jürgen Klein, eds. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996: 245–268.

Monk, Samuel H. “The Sublime: Burke’s Enquiry”. *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism.* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 25–41.

More, Max and Kurzweil, Ray. “Max More and Ray Kurzweil on the Singularity”. *Kurzweil AI.* 26 February 2002. http://www.kurzweilai.net/max-more-and-ray-kurzweil-on-the-singularity-2

Morgenstern, Joe. “This Sequel Doesn't Add Up: Watered-Down 'Ocean's 12' Is Disorganized Crime Caper”. *Wall Street Journal.* 10 December 2004. http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB110263841943896346

Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”. *Screen* (1975) Vol 16, issue 3: 6–18.

Nagib, Lúcia. “Film as Literature or the Truffaldian Malaise (*L’Homme qui aimait les femmes*)”. *A Companion to François Truffaut*. Dudley Andrew and Anne Gillain, eds. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Nemoianu, Virgil. “Robert Southey’s The Doctor: The Conservatism of Voracious Reading”. *Romanticism Across the Disciplines.* Larry H. Peer, ed. Maryland: University Press of America, 1998: 187–205.

Novalis. *Philosophical Writings*. Mahony Stoljar, Margaret, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

O’Hagan, Sean. “Sofia Coppola”. *The Observer*. 8 Oct 2006. http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2006/10/10/marie_antoinette_2006_review.shtml

O’Pray, Michael. *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions.* London: Wallflower, 2003.

Orr, John. *Romanticists and Modernists in British Cinema.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Palmer, Allison Lee. *Historical Dictionary of Neoclassical Art and Architecture. Plymouth*: Scarecrow Press, 2011.

Papamicheal, Stella. “Marie Antoinette”. *BBC*. 19 Oct 2006. http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2006/10/10/marie_antoinette_2006_review.shtml

Patterson, John. “Spike Jonze on Jackass, Scarlett Johansson’s erotic voice and techno love,” *Guardian*, 28 November 2013. www.theguardian.com/film/2013/nov/28/spike-jonze-her-interview-scarlett-johansson-joaquin-phoenix-jackass

Pattison, George. *Kierkegaard and the quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism: Selected Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Pavel, Thomas G. *Fictional Worlds.* London: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Peer, Larry H. *Romanticism and the Object.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Pelly, Rich. “Apple’s Siri on Her: ‘Who Is Whacking Phoenix?’ *The Guardian*. 12 February 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/feb/12/apple-siri-her-spike-jones-joaquin-phoenix

Perkins, Claire. *American Smart Cinema.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Perkins, V.F. “Johnny Guitar”. *The Movie Book of the Western.* Cameron, Ian and Pye, Douglas, eds. London: Studio Vista, 1996: 221–228.

Perloff, Marjorie. “Postmodernism/’Fin de Siecle’: Defining ‘Difference’ in Late Twentieth-century Poetics.” *Romanticism and Postmodernism.* Edward Larrissy, , ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 179–209.

Perry, Seamus. “Romanticism: The Brief History of a Concept”. *A Companion to Romanticism.* Duncan Wu, ed. Oxford : Blackwell Publishers, 1997: 3–11.

Pfau, Thomas. *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Plantinga, Carl. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2009.

Pottle, Frederick A. "The Eye and the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth". *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism,* Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Norton and Company, 1970: 273–287.

Price, Uvedale. *Essays on the Picturesque, Vol I.* London: J. Mawman, 1810.

Proust, Marcel. *Swann's Way.* London: Penguin Classics, 2004.

Putnam, Hilary. *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Quinlivan, Davina. "A Dark and Shiny Place: the Disembodied Female Voice, Irigarayan Subjectivity and the 'Political Erotics' of hearing *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013)". *Locating the Voice in Film: Critical Approaches and Global Practices*. Tom Whittaker and Sarah Wright (eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Raysor, Thomas M., and S. T. Coleridge. "Unpublished Fragments on Aesthetics." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 22, 1925, 529.

Reed, Rex. "Could Synecdoche, New York be the Worst Movie Ever? Yes!" *The Observer.* 21 October 08. http://observer.com/2008/10/could-isynecdoche-new-yorki-be-the-worst-movie-ever-yes/

Renninger, Brice. "Spike Jonze, Why Are There No Brown People in Your Future Los Angeles?" *Indiewire*. 14 October 2013. http://www.indiewire.com/article/spike-jonze-why-are-there-no-brown-people-in-your-future-los-angeles

Richardson, Alan. *The Neural Sublime*: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Richardson, Alan. *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Richardson, Alan. "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine". *Romanticism and Feminism.* Anne K. Mellor, ed. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 1988: 13–25.

Rickey, Carrie. "Lost and Found". *DGA Quarterly.* Spring 2013. http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/1302-Spring-2013/Sofia-Coppola.aspx

Roberts, Andrew Michael. "Romantic Irony and the Postmodern Sublime." *Romanticism and Postmodernism.* Larrissy, Edward, Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 141–156.

Romney, Jonathan. "Family Album". *Sight and Sound*. March 2002. Vol.12(3): 12–16.

Rorty, Richard. "Getting Rid of the Appearance-Reality Distinction". *New Literary History*, Vol. 47, No. 1, John Hopkins University Press. Winter 2016: 67–81.

Rose, Jacqueline. *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction.* London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984.

Rosenblum, Jordan. "The 30 Most Polarizing Movies of the 21st Century". *Obscure Movie Stats.* 05 Sept 2016. https://medium.com/taste/the-30-most-polarizing-movies-of-the-21st-century-b0efc4515538#.ijw24l1xt

Roud, Richard. "The Left Bank Revisited" *Monthly Film Bulletin, 46*, Summer 1977: 143.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile.* Public Domain e-book, 1763.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract.* BN Publishing, 2007.

Rowland, Ann Wierda. *Romanticism and Childhood.* 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Rushton, Richard. "Cavell and the Politics of Cinema: On Marie Antoinette". *Film-Philosophy* 18 (2014): 110–127.

Rybin, Steven. "The Jellyfish and the Moonlight: Imagining the Family in Wes Anderson's Films" *The Films of Wes Anderson.* Peter C. Kunze, ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014: 39–50.

Rzepka, Charles J. *The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats.* London: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Sass, Louis. "Psychoanalysis, Romanticism, and the Nature Of Aesthetic Consciousness." *A Psychoanalytic Review*. 1 Oct 1998; 85, 5; 717.

Schapiro, Barbara A. *The Romantic Mother: Narcissistic Patterns in Romantic Poetry.* London: John Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Schellekens, Elisabeth. *Aesthetics and Morality*. London: Continuum, 2007.

Schiller, J.C. Friedrich Von. *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*. 1794. http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/schiller-education.asp

Schlegel, Friedrich. *Lucinde and the Fragments.* Peter Firchow, trans. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Sconce, Jeffrey. "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film". *Screen* 43 4 Winter 2002: 349–369.

Scott, A.O. "Movie Review: The Darjeeling Limited." *The New York Times*. 28 September 2007. <www.nytimes.com/2007/09/28/movies/28darj.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>.

Scott, A.O. "The Pampered Life, Viewed from the Inside". The *New York Times*. 21

Sept 2010.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/22/movies/22somewhere.html?_r=0

Scott, A.O. "Please to Not Feed or Annoy the Woebegone Prodigies". *The New York Times.* 14 December 2001.
http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/14/movies/film-review-please-do-not-feed-or-annoy-the-woebegone-prodigies.html

Scott, A.O. "Evanescent Trees and Sisters in an Enchanted 1970's Suburb". *The New York Times.* 21 April 2000.
http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9901EEDE1E31F932A15757C0A9669C8B63

Seitz, Matt Zoller. "The Substance of Style." *The Museum of the Moving Image Source.* 30 March 2009-13 April 2009. <www.movingimagesource.us/articles/the-substance-of-style-pt-1-20090330>.

Seitz, Matt Zoller. *The Wes Anderson Collection*. New York: Abrams, 2013.

Sha, Robert C. "Byron, Polidori, and the Epistemology of Romantic Pleasure" *Romanticism and Pleasure.* Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert, eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010: 17–38.

Shaviro, Steven. "*Melancholia*, or, the Romantic Anti-Sublime". *Sequence: Serial Studies in Media, Film and Music*, 1.1, 2012.
http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/sequence1/1-1-melancholia-or-the-romantic-anti-sublime/

Shaw, Philip. *The Sublime.* London: Routledge, 2005.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry*. *The Four Ages of Poetry Etc*. H.F.B. Brett-Smith, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1921.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*. Lynch, Jack ed. Rutgers University.

andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/prometheus.html

Schroder, Maurice Zoreknsy. *Icarus: The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961.

Siegel, Tatiana. "What Female Directors are Telling the EEOC: 'Very Sad, Disappointing, Criminal Details". *Hollywood Reporter*. 11 November 2015. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/what-female-directors-are-telling-839107

Singer, Irving. *The Nature of Love 2.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

Sinnerbrink, Robert. *"Stimmung*: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood". *Screen* 53:2 Summer 2012: 148–163.

Smith, Charlotte. *Beachy Head with other Poems.* London: J. Johnson, 1807.

Smith, David L. "How to Be a Genuine Fake: *Her*, Alan Watts, and the Problem of the Self". *Journal of Religion and Film* Vol 18, issue 2, October 2014.

Smith, David L. "Synecdoche, in Part". *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011: 239–253.

Smith, Ethan. "Spike Jonze Unmasked." *New York Magazine.* http://nymag.com/nymetro/movies/features/1267/

Snell, Robert. *Uncertainties, Mysteries, Doubts: Romanticism and the Analytic Attitude* London: Routledge, 2013.

Sontag, Susan. "Notes on Camp." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961: 275–292.

Spaeth, Ryu. “Spike Jonze’s *Her* Is Actually a Terrible Movie”. *The Week*. 23 January 2014. http://theweek.com/articles/452374/spike-jonzes-actually-terrible-movie

Speight, Allen, "Friedrich Schlegel". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/schlegel

Stam, Robert. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Sternbergh, Adam. “In Conversation: Charlie Kaufman”. *Vulture.* http://www.vulture.com/2015/12/charlie-kaufman-anomaslisa-c-v-r.html

Stueber, Karsten. “Empathy”. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/empathy/>

Steyn, Mark. “Missing the Boat”. *The Spectator.* 19 February 2005: 34.

Suchenski, Richard I. *Projections of Memory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Swann, Karen. “Suffering and Sensation in The Ruined Cottage”. PMLA. Vol. 106, No. 1 (Jan. 1991): 83–95.

Thompson, Anne. “Exclusive Interview: With *Somewhere*, Sofia Coppola Grows Up”. *Indiewire*. 14 Sep 2010. http://www.indiewire.com/2010/09/exclusive-interview-with-somewhere-sofia-coppola-grows-up-238428/

Thompson, Kristen. “The Concept of Cinematic Excess”. *Cine-Tracts.* Vol. 1 No. 2, Summer 1977. University of Wisconsin Milwaukee: 54–63.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. London: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Thorlby, Anthony. “Imagination and Irony in English Romantic Poetry”. *Romantic Irony*. Frederick Garber, ed. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988: 131–155.

Thorslev, Peter L. Jr. *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Tobias, Scott. “Interview: Charlie Kaufman”. *A.V. Club.* 22 Oct 2008. http://www.avclub.com/article/charlie-kaufman-14322

Tobias, Scott. “Sofia Coppola: Virgin Territory”. *AV Club*. 3 May 2000. http://www.avclub.com/article/sofia-coppola-13656

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.

Trilling, Lionel. “The Fate of Pleasure”. *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning*. London: Penguin, 1965.

Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity.* London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Tzioumakis, Yannis. *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Vandevelde, Pol. *Heidegger and the Romantics: The Literary Invention of Meaning.* London: Routledge, 2011.

Vermeulen, Timotheus and Van Den Akker, Robin. “Notes on metamodernism”. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture***,** Nov. 2010. <http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/5677>. Date accessed: 16 Aug 2016.

Vidler, Anthony. *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely.* London: MIT Press, 1992.

Vincendeau, Ginette. “Introduction: In Focus: The French New Wave at Fifty”. *Cinema Journal* 49 no. 4 Summer 2010: 135–138.

The Virgin Suicides Production Notes. *Cinema Review.* http://www.cinemareview.com/production.asp?prodid=959

Ward, Geoff. “A Being All Alike? Teleotropic Syntax in Ashbery and Wordsworth”. *Romanticism and Postmodernism.* Larrissy, Edward, Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 86–97.

Waugh, Patricia. *Practicing Postmodernism, reading modernism*. London: Edward Arnold, 1992.

Webb, Samantha. “Exhausted Appetites, Vitiated Tastes: Romanticism, Mass Culture, and the Pleasures of Consumption”. *Romanticism and Pleasure*. Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert, eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010: 149-166.

Weber, Caroline. *Queen of Fashion: What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*. London: Aurum Press, 2007.

Weiner, Joshua. “Unbearable Whiteness.” *Slate*. 27 September 2007. <www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2007/09/unbearable_whiteness.html>.

Weston, Peter. “*Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion:* Progress Through Suffering”. *Critical Essays on Keats Poems and Letters*. Linda Cookson and Bryan Loughrey, eds. London: Longman, 1988: 101–111.

Wharton, Edith. *A Backward Glance.* London: Constable, 1962.

Whitworth, Michael H. *Modernism*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Wiedmann, August K. *Romantic Roots in Modern Art: Romanticism and Expressionism: A Study in Comparative Aesthetics.* Gresham Books, 1979.

Wilson, Colin. “Phenomenology as a Mystical Discipline”. *Philosophy Now.* Issue 56.https://philosophynow.org/issues/56/Phenomenology_as_a_Mystical_Discipline

Winakur Tontplaphol, Betsy. “Pleasure in an Age of Talkers: Keats’s Material Sublime”. *Romanticism and Pleasure*. Thomas H. Schmid and Michelle Faubert, eds. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010: 39–59.

Wolf, Mark J.P. *Building Imaginary Worlds.* London: Routledge, 2012.

Wollstonecraft Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein, or, The modern Prometheus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Wordsworth, William. *The Complete Poetical Works.* London: Macmillan and Co., 1888. Bartleby.com, 1999. Accessed online. http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww287.html

Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850.* Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill, eds. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979.

Wordsworth, William. *Wordsworth’s Preface to Lyrical Ballads.* Owen, W.J.B., Ed. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957.

Yeager, Patricia, “Towards a Female Sublime”. *Gender and Theory.* Linda Kauffman, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1989: 191–209.

Yousef, Nancy. “Romanticism, Psychoanalysis and the Interpretation of Silence”. *European Romantic Review* Vol. 21, No. 5, October 2010: 653–672.

Zeitchik, Steven “Five Days of Her: Editing Samantha in (and out)”, *Los Angeles Times,* 30 December 2013. http://articles.latimes.com/2013/dec/26/entertainment/la-et-mn-her-spike-jonze-cinematography-20131226

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

Filmography

À bout de souffle. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Perf. Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean Seberg. Les Films Impéria, 1960.

Adaptation. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. Nicolas Cage, Meryl Streep, Chris Cooper. Propaganda Films, Good Machine, 2002.

A.I. Artificial Intelligence. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Jude Law, Haley Joel Osment, Frances O'Connor. Warner Bros., DreamWorks SKG, Amblin Entertainment, Stanley Kubrick Productions, 2001.

Anderson, Wes. "Director's Commentary". *Fantastic Mr Fox.* The Criterion Collection, 2014.

Anderson, Wes. "Director's Commentary". *The Life Aquatic.* The Criterion Collection, 2005.

Anderson, Wes. "Director's Commentary". *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The Criterion Collection, 2002.

Anomalisa. Dir. Charlie Kaufman. Perf. David Thewlis, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Tom Noonan. Starburns Industries, Snoot Entertainment, 2015.

Baisers voles (*Stolen Kisses).* Dir. François Truffaut. Perf. Jean-Pierre Léaud, Delphine Seyrig. Les Films du Carrosse, Les Productions Artistes Associés, 1968.

Being John Malkovich. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. John Cusack, Cameron Diaz, Catherine Keener. Gramercy Pictures, Propaganda Films, 1999.

The Bling Ring. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Emma Watson, Leslie Mann. American Zoetrope, 2013.

Bottle Rocket. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Owen Wilson, Luke Wilson. Columbia Pictures, Gracie Films, 1996.

Carrie. Dir. Brian De Palma. Perf. Sissey Spacek, Piper Laurie. Red Bank Films, 1976.

Cléo de 5 à 7. Dir. Agnès Varda Perf. Corinne Marchand. Ciné Tamaris, Rome Paris Films, 1962.

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind. Dir. George Clooney. Perf. Sam Rockwell, Drew Barrymore. Miramax, Mad Chance, 2002.

The Darjeeling Limited. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Owen Wilson, Jason Schwartzman, Adrien Brody, Anjelica Huston. American Empirical, Fox Searchlight, 2007.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Dir. Michel Gondry. Perf. Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet. Focus Features, Anonymous Content, This Is That, 2004.

Fantastic Mr Fox. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. George Clooney, Meryl Streep, Michael Gambon, Bill Murray. Blu-ray. Criterion Collection, 2014.

The Fighter. Dir. David O. Russell. Perf. Christian Bale, Mark Wahlberg, Amy Adams. The Weinstein Company, Closest to the Hole Productions, Mandeville Films, Relativity Media, 2010.

Frances Ha. Dir. Noah Baumbach. Perf. Greta Gerwig, Mickey Sumner. Pine District Pictures, Scott Rudin Productions, RT Features, 2012.

The Grand Budapest Hotel. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Ralph Fiennes, F. Murray Abraham, Jeff Goldblum. Fox Searchlight, Indian Paintbrush, American Empirical, 2014.

Her. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. Joaquin Phoenix, Scarlett Johansson, Amy Adams.

Annapurna Pictures, 2013.

Human Nature. Dir. Michel Gondry. Perf. Patricia Arquette, Tim Robbins, Rhys Ifans. Fine Line Pictures, Studio Canal, Good Machine, 2001.

I Heart Huckabees. Dir. David O. Russell. Perf. Dustin Hoffman, Lily Tomlin, Jason Schwartzman. Qwerty Films, Scott Rudin Productions, 2004.

"I'm Here." Dir. Spike Jonze. 2010. *Absolut*. http://www.imheremovie.com/#

Jeremiah Johnson. Dir. Sydney Pollack. Perf. Robert Redford, Will Geer. Sanford Productions, Warner Bros., 1972.

Les deux Anglaises et le continent (Two English Girls). Dir. François Truffaut. Perf. Jean-Pierre Léaud, Kika Markham. Les Films du Carrosse, Cinétel, 1971.

"Lick the Star". Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Christina Turley, Audrey Kelly. Film Movement, 1998.

The Life Aquatic. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Bill Murray, Owen Wilson, Anjelica Huston. DVD. Criterion Collection, 2004.

Lost in Translation. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Scarlett Johansson, Bill Murray. American Zoetrope, Focus Features, 2003.

The Magnificent Ambersons. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Joseph Cotten, Anne Baxter. Mercury Productions, 1942.

Marie Antoinette. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Kirsten Dunst, Jason Schwartzman, Steve Coogan. American Zoetrope, Columbia Pictures, 2006.

"The Midnight Coterie of Sinister Intruders." *Saturday Night Live.* NBC. 26 October 2013.

Moonrise Kingdom. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Edward Norton, Bruce Willis, Frances McDormand, Bill Murray. Indian Paintbrush, American Empirical, 2012.

Newsnight. "An exclusive BBC interview with Spike Jonze, director of 'Her'". 14 February 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vAJGE97e4A

The Royal Tenenbaums. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Gene Hackman, Anjelica Huston, Luke Wilson, Gwyneth Paltrow. DVD. Criterion Collection, 2001.

Rushmore. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Jason Schwartzman, Bill Murray. American Empirical, Touchstone, 1998.

The Science of Sleep. Dir. Michel Gondry. Perf. Gael García Bernal, Charlotte Gainsbourg. Gaumont, Partizan Films, Canal+, 2006.

Silver Linings Playbook. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Bradley Cooper, Robert De Niro. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

Somewhere. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Stephen Dorff, Elle Fanning. American Zoetrope, Focus Features, 2010.

Spanking the Monkey. Dir. David O. Russell. Perf. Jeremy Davies, Alberta Watson. Buckeye Films, Swelter Films, 1994.

The Squid and the Whale. Dir. Noah Baumbach. Perf. Jeff Daniels, Laura Linney, Jesse Eisenberg. American Empirical, Peter Newman Productions, 2005.

Synecdoche, New York. Dir. Charlie Kaufman. Perf. Philip Seymour Hoffman, Michelle Williams, Samantha Morton. Sony Pictures Classics, 2009.

Three Kings. Dir. David O. Russell. Perf. George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, Spike Jonze. Warner Bros., Atlas Entertainment, 1999.

Tout Va Bien. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Perf. Jane Fonda, Yves Montand. Anouchka Films Vieco Films, Empire Films, 1972.

The Virgin Suicides. Dir. Sofia Coppola. Perf. Kirsten Dunst, Kathleen Turner, James Woods. American Zoetrope, 1999.

"Wes Anderson Reteams with Favorite Objects for 'Grand Budapest Hotel'." *The Onion.* <www.theonion.com/video/wes-anderson-reteams-with-favorite-objects-forgra,34340/?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=SocialMarketing&utm_campaign=LinkPreview:2:Default>.

Where the Wild Things Are. Dir. Spike Jonze. Perf. Max Records, JamesGandolfini, Catherine Keener. Warner Bros., 2010.